WARSAW STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORY 2

Zofia Wóycicka

Arrested Mourning

Memory of the Nazi Camps in Poland, 1944-1950

PETER LANG EDITION

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Translated by Jasper Tilbury

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List of Abbreviations

AAN	Central Archives of Modern Records
AIPN	Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance
AK	Home Army
APMAB	Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim
APMM	Archives of the State Museum at Majdanek
AŻIH	Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute
BCh	Peasants Battalions
BŻAP	Bulletin of the Jewish News Agency
CHD	Retail Trade Organisation
CKOS	Central Committee for Social Welfare
CKŻP	Central Committee of Jews in Poland
CZM	Central Museum Board
CŻKH	Central Jewish Historical Commission
FIAPP	Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques (International Federation of Former Political Prisoners)
GKBZNwP	Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland
GKW	Central Vetting Committee of the PZbWP
GL	People's Guard
KdAW	Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer (Committee of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters)
KC PZPR	Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party
KL	Konzentrationslager (Concentration Camp)
KG MO	Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia
KOS	Committee for Social Welfare
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
KUOT	Committee for the Commemoration of Treblinka Victims
KRN	National Homeland Council
KŻ	Jewish Committee
MAP	Ministry of Public Administration
MKiS	Ministry of Art and Culture
MON	Ministry of Defence
MPiOS	Ministry of Labour and Social Care
NSZ	National Army Forces
NTN	Supreme National Tribunal
PCK	Polish Red Cross

PKWN	Polish Committee of National Liberation
PMM	State Museum at Majdanek
PMOB	State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau
POP	Basic Party Cell
PPR	Polish Workers' Party
PPS	Polish Socialist Party
PRL	Polish People's Republic
PSL	Polish Peasants' Party
PUR	National Office for Repatriation
PZbWP	Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
ROPWiM	Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites
ROS	Social Welfare Council of the PZbWP
SARP	Polish Architects' Association
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SD	Democratic Party
SkAPMAB	Repository of Records of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim
SN	Supreme Court
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SSK	Special Criminal Court
TSKŻ	Social and Cultural Association of Jews
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
VVN	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Society of People Persecuted by the Nazi Regime)
WP	Polish Army
WUBP	Provincial Office of State Security
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
ZBoWiD	Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy
ZG PZbWP	Executive Board of the PZbWP
ZG ZboWiD	Executive Board of ZboWiD
ZIW	Union of War Disabled
ZO PZbWP	Branch Executive Board of the PZbWP
ZŻP	Union of Jewish Partisans
ZUWZoNiD	Union of Participants in the Armed Struggle for Independence and Democracy
ZŻUWZzF	Union of Jewish Participants in the Armed Struggle against Fascism
ŻIH	Jewish Historical Institute
ŻKH	Jewish Historical Commission

Introduction

In the mid-1980s, after protracted efforts, the Carmelite Order was granted permission by the Polish authorities to establish a convent in one of the buildings of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex. This decision sparked protest among Jewish groups. Two conferences were convened in Geneva, attended by representatives of the Catholic Church and Jewish organisations in Poland and abroad, during which it was agreed that the Carmelite nuns would be moved to a soon-to-be-established Centre for Dialogue and Prayer located at a certain distance from the Memorial Museum. In the years to follow, however, no progress was made on this matter. Meanwhile, the events of 1989—the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the opening of borders, and the Round Table talks between Solidarity and Poland's Communist government—led to an escalation of the dispute. In mid-July 1989, barely a few weeks after Poland's first free elections, the American Rabbi Avi Weiss and a group of his supporters scaled the walls of the Carmelite convent to protest against the continued presence of the nuns within the perimeter of the camp. Weiss and his colleagues were forcibly removed from the site by local workers. To prevent further conflict, the Vatican confirmed the existing arrangements concerning the construction of the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer and the relocation of the Carmelite nuns, which eventually took place in 1993.

The dispute did not end there, however. In June 1998, a group of Polish nationalists occupied the former courtyard of the Carmelite convent and put up several crosses. The purpose of this action was to protest against the authorities' plan to remove the huge cross that had been erected on the site in 1989 and which originated from an altar at which Pope John Paul II had celebrated Mass during his first visit to Poland in 1979. Although both the Polish government and the Catholic Church distanced themselves from the protest, neither had the courage to intervene. It was not until several months later, in May 1999, that all the crosses, whose number had in the meantime risen to 300, were moved to a nearby Franciscan monastery. The "Papal cross", however, remained in its original location.

Although Polish–Jewish relations continue to be tainted by conflict, the kind of dispute that took place over Auschwitz in the 1990s would seem unthinkable nowadays. In the past decade, Polish notions about the history of Auschwitz have undergone a significant transformation. Public opinion research shows that an increasing number of Poles see Auschwitz as a place primarily associated with the Holocaust. In 1995, 47 per cent of respondents regarded Auschwitz as a "place of Polish martyrdom" above all else, while only eight per cent considered it to be

"primarily a place where Jews were exterminated".[1] Research conducted in 2010 showed that, for the first time, more people saw Auschwitz primarily as a place where Jews were exterminated (47.4 per cent) than as a place of Polish martyrdom (39.2 per cent).[2] Yet, despite these changes, there are still major differences between Poland, Israel, Germany, and other West European countries in the way the history and significance of Auschwitz is understood and, more broadly, in how the events of the Second World War are interpreted.

In 1999/2000, when the final act in the dispute over the Auschwitz crosses was being played out, I was on an academic scholarship at the University of Jena, where I attended Professor Lutz Niethammer's seminar on memory of the Second World War. It fell to me to explain to my fellow participants the background of the conflict that was taking place in Poland. The more I immersed myself in the topic, the more apparent it became that the dispute could not be explained solely in terms of Polish nationalism and anti-Semitism, although these factors certainly played a significant role. At the root of this "conflict of memory" lay genuine differences in the wartime experience and the impossibility of communicating and comparing that experience across the Iron Curtain. To understand the essence of the dispute, it was above all necessary to analyse the circumstances under which memory of the Second World War evolved during the Communist period. But it would not be enough simply to recreate the official historical policy of the Polish authorities. Even in a totalitarian or authoritarian state, which the People's Republic undoubtedly was, historical memory is never formed exclusively from the top down. The key questions seemed to be: what were the mechanisms that shaped the public image of the past during the Communist period? Was that image negotiable, and if it was, how did the disputes and negotiations proceed? Who participated in them and on what terms, and who was excluded and how?

The subject of this book, therefore, is the process by which **"social memory"** of the Second World War took shape in Poland. In my study, I rely on a theory developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by British scholars associated with the Popular Memory Group, among them Richard Johnson and Graham Dawson. Analysis of the oral history testimonies they collected led Johnson and Dawson to conclude that there exist two types of social memory: **"popular memory"** and **"dominant memory"**. They define popular memory as individual recollections and representations of the past that are mainly transmitted through everyday life, in conversations with friends and family. Dominant memory, on the other hand, consists of those narratives that find expression in the public realm and thus shape social representations of the past; it is created by the **"historical apparatus"**,

1 Marek Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, Kraków 2005, p. 292.

2 Marek Kucia, *Auschwitz w świadomości społecznej Polaków A.D. 2010*, survey conducted by TNS OBOP, 7-10 Jan. 2010.

which comprises a myriad of public institutions such as schools, public and private media, the civil service, as well as civic organisations and associations. The concepts of popular and dominant memory should be seen as Weberian "ideal types"; in reality, the boundaries between these two spheres remain fluid. Popular memory constantly strives to break through into the public realm and assume a dominant position. Defining the concept of dominant memory in greater detail, Johnson and Dawson write:

> This term points to the power and pervasiveness of historical representations, their connections with dominant institutions and the part they play in winning consent and building alliances in the process of formal politics. But we do not mean to imply that conceptions of the past that acquire a dominance in the field of public representations are either monolithically installed or everywhere believed in. Not all the historical representations that win access to the public field are 'dominant'. The field is crossed by competing constructions of the past, often at war with each other. Dominant memory is produced in the course of these struggles and is always open to contestation. We do want to insist, however, that there are real processes of domination in the historical field. Certain representations achieve centrality and luxuriate grandly; others are marginalized or excluded or reworked.[3]

Several historians interested in the changing memory of the First and Second World Wars in Europe, notably Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, Pieter Lagrou, Amir Weiner, and Harold Marcuse, rely on similar assumptions.[4] Their main focus is the role that **"agents of memory"**—in other words, organisations or institutions that actively seek to promote and consolidate a particular historical interpretation—play in the creation of dominant memory. All members of a given community, including intellectual elites, historians, writers, journalists, and artists, may participate in these negotiations, but the greatest importance is attributed to **"memory groups"** (*milieux de mémoire*). The basis for the emergence of a memory group is a community linked by shared historical experience and a conception of the past which is shaped by that experience; it very often also has common needs and interests. Such memory groups include, for instance, Polish former concentration camp prisoners, members of the Polish Home Army, and German expellees. Usually these groups have an institutionalised structure, although some

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3 Popular Memory Group, "Popular memory: theory, politics, method" in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds) *The Oral History Reader*, London–NY 1998, p. 76.

4 Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, Cambridge 2000; Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, "Setting the Framework" in idem (eds) *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 2000; Jay Winter, "Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War" in ibid.; Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Princeton 2000; Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau. The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, Cambridge 2001.

may exist without their own organisation. For a memory group to exist, there must be communication within the given community and an ability to undertake joint action. Harold Marcuse explains the concept as follows:

> The vague but popular term "collective memory" can be used to refer to a set of more specific images of and opinions about the past held by members of what I call a memory group. Such groups usually share common experiences and goals, as well as images of the past. Jewish Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe, German SS veterans and members of the French Resistance would be examples of memory groups. Other groups with common but unrelated historical experience, such as victims of forced sterilization, army deserters, or forced laborers, only become memory groups when they begin to share their memories. Individuals who accept the memories, values, and aspirations become part of a memory group; members who no longer share them, leave it.[5]

Memory groups are sometimes established along political lines. Thus, for instance, in post-war France there were two competing organisations of former concentration camp inmates and members of the resistance—the Gaullist *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés de la Résistance* and the Communist-dominated *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés Résistants et Patriotes*. However, as Pieter Lagrou points out, these groups were founded not so much on shared political beliefs as on the common experience of their members. Memory groups may also have particular interests that do not necessarily accord with the views of the political parties to which their members feel an affinity. Aside from propagating their own image of the past, they usually have other goals, too, such as organising self-help campaigns or lobbying the authorities to gain various social privileges. Of course, the activities of memory groups are necessarily limited by the lifespan of the participants and witnesses to a given historical event. In time, these groups become fragmented as members die out and organisations cease to exist. What remains, in the words of Jay Winter, is a "national framework", "a thin cover over a host of associative forms arduously constructed over years by thousands of people, mostly obscure".[6]

Aside from memory groups, the aforementioned historians also point to other agents of memory, which include, principally, representatives of the central and local state administration. With wide-ranging powers and significant financial resources at their disposal, civil servants can influence public discourse by, for instance, punishing or granting amnesty to war criminals, setting school curricula, decreeing national holidays and awarding state decorations, financing the construction of museums and monuments, and distributing social privileges. Such activities may be collectively termed **"historical policy"** (*Geschichtspolitik*).

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5 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, p. 14.

6 Winter, "Forms of Kinship and Remembrance", p. 60.

Irrespective of whether historical policy is conducted by the government of a democratic state, or of an authoritarian or totalitarian one, its principal goals are usually the same: to legitimise authority and the existing social system and to strengthen group identity.

The above model describing the mechanisms by which collective memory is formed was developed mainly on the basis of research that concerns civil societies: Lagrou analyses the disputes over the interpretation of the Second World War in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France in the years 1945-1965; Marcuse attempts to reconstruct the history of the conflicts around the creation of the memorial museum in Dachau in West Germany; and Jay Winter explores the process by which representations of the First World War took shape in West European countries. The question arises, therefore, to what extent this theory can be applied to authoritarian or totalitarian states, where citizens have far fewer possibilities to organise themselves or to articulate their views and interests. As the Polish sociologist Barbara Szacka notes, "in non-democratic regimes, where the dominance of the state is all too evident and provokes resistance, memory of the past becomes a battleground for the legitimization or delegitimization of the system. Officially endorsed images of the past that strengthen the authorities' claims to legitimacy are rejected and alternative images that undermine those claims are created. A major gap develops between official memory and social memory".[7] But is it really true that the USSR and other countries of the Eastern bloc were characterised by a total separation of "social memory" from "official memory"? Amir Weiner, the author of a monograph on the changing memory of the Second World War in the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia, shows that in the Soviet Union, even under Stalin, there were various "memory groups" within the Communist Party—former Soviet partisans and Red Army veterans, for instance—all of which attempted to impose their own interpretation of the events of 1941-1945.

In the case of Communist Poland, it would seem that from the outset there were aspects of the events of 1939-1945 that were publicly taboo, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Katyń, and the fate of Polish citizens deported to the East. The communities affected by these events—Siberian deportees, families of the Katyń victims, displaced persons from the Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*) of the Second Polish Republic—had no possibility to organise themselves or to articulate their views and interests through the official channels. For this reason, to speak of an image of the past being negotiated by various agents of memory does not seem justified here. Nevertheless, it is also true to say that there were significant areas where such negotiation was permitted, at least during certain periods. One such area was the memory of Nazi concentration camps and death camps.

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7 Barbara Szacka, "Pamięć zbiorowa i wojna", *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 2, 49 (2000), p. 16.

When deciding upon a timeframe for my study, I took up the idea put forward by the Polish historian Robert Traba that in 1944/45-1949 social memory of the Second World War had not yet been fully established or codified in Poland and found expression in numerous, often spontaneous and competing remembrance initiatives. Traba calls those years "a period of active memory". He attributes this phenomenon first to the "direct proximity of the traumatic experiences of the war years, which caused a huge degree of emotional involvement on the part of society", and second to the fact that "public debate on wartime remembrance had not yet been fully monopolised by the state".[8] It was not until the end of the 1940s, Traba argues, as Stalinism tightened its grip on social and cultural life, that historical policy in Poland came to be completely subordinated to the needs of Communist propaganda. The second half of the 1940s would appear, therefore, to be a particularly interesting period for analysis; it allows the historian on the one hand to reveal the polyphony of wartime memory under conditions of relative pluralism in Poland and on the other to reconstruct the process by which debate was gradually silenced as the totalitarian regime consolidated its power.

The year 1950 may be seen as the culminating point in the "Stalinsation" of historical memory in Poland. For it was then that two events occurred of symbolic importance to the development of Polish ideas about the Nazi death camps and concentration camps: in February 1950, Tadeusz Borowski wrote an article for *Odrodzenie* [Rebirth] in which he distanced himself from his Auschwitz stories, thus marking his entry into Socialist Realism[9]; and in November, on the orders of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, a new exhibition opened in the State Museum at Auschwitz which turned the camp into an instrument of Cold War propaganda.

This book consists of two parts. In part one, I discuss the groups and institutions which in the second half of the 1940s were most heavily involved in shaping the memory of Nazi concentration camps. I try to reconstruct the negotiations that took place within and between those groups and institutions on how the camp experience should be interpreted. In part two, I discuss how the notions embraced by those various agents of memory, and the conflicts and negotiations between them, were manifested in material forms of remembrance. I analyse the fate of former concentration camps and death camps, which, as genuine historical sites, cemeteries and remnants, with which many people's personal memories were associated, naturally aspired to the title of **"sites of memory"** (*lieux de mémoire*, *Erinnerungsorte*). I refer here to the definition of sites of memory proposed by

8 Robert Traba, "Symbole pamięci: II wojna światowa w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków. Szkic do tematu" in idem *Kraina tysiąca granic. Szkice o historii i pamięci*, Olsztyn 2003, p. 181.

9 Tadeusz Borowski, "Rozmowy", *Odrodzenie*, 19 Feb. 1950.

Maurice Halbwachs in his classic study of social memory, *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte* (1941), rather than to the definition developed by the French scholar Pierre Nora in the 1980s. For Nora, sites of memory are not just topographical places but all the historical figures and events, all the concepts and symbols, that make up the identity of a given nation. In the case of France, he includes among sites of memory Joan of Arc, Vichy, the Marseillaise, 14 July, and the juxtaposition "Gaullists and Communists".[10] I understand the term "sites of memory" more literally—as topographical places which, on account of their history, are of major importance in developing a sense of identity among a given group of people. In my analysis, sites of memory are therefore treated as one of the fields where competing representations of the past and the competing interests of various social actors are manifested.

10 *Les lieux de mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora, Vol. 1-3, Paris 1984-1992.

PART I
PEOPLE

Chapter 1
Former Prisoners: "Finest Sons of the Fatherland" or "Hapless Victims of the Camps"?[1]

> We have come to see all former prisoners as victims of political persecution, as martyrs of ideas. We have come to see the concentration camp as a torture chamber for honourable people—fighters of irreproachable character and indomitable will. What a tragic misunderstanding! It was members of the resistance who stuck the label of idealism onto the concentration camp. To admit it is painful, but this myth must be exposed once and for all. We, prisoners, do not ask for pathos. All we want is an assessment of the naked truth. The camps were horrific precisely because they were so vile; because idealistic and truly honourable people were forced to live side by side with lesser beings—with the dull and mindless masses […][2]

These words were written by Maria Jezierska, a former inmate of Auschwitz-Birkenau, in an article for the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* in September 1946. Jezierska's description is very different from the image of the political prisoner found in many other publications of the time and from later years. For instance, in her memoir published shortly after the war, the Catholic writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, also a former Birkenau inmate, wrote:

> When the Germans entered Poland in 1939, they underestimated the role of Polish women. [...] The first year of occupation opened their eyes. They were shocked to discover that Polish women participated on equal terms to Polish men in the struggle for independence; that they rivalled men in their courage, initiative, perseverance, and readiness to fight, and surpassed them in their resilience to torture. [...] With increasing anger, the Germans realised that these characteristics were true of Polish women in general and not restricted to a particular class or group. […] These facts aroused hatred towards Polish women. To the Germans, women of the resistance—women who dared to oppose the conquerors of the world—appeared as degenerate, malicious and repugnant beings, deserving of ruthless extermination. It was from this disgust that Birkenau was born.[3]

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1 "Wyjazd delegatów b. więźniów politycznych na Kongres do Warszawy", *Gazeta Ludowa*, 3 Feb. 1946; "B. Więźniowie awangardą walki z faszyzmem. Rezolucje kongresu b. więźniów politycznych obozów niemieckich", *Życie Warszawy*, 6 Feb. 1946.

2 Maria Jezierska, "Obrachunek", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 Sep. 1946.

3 Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, *Z otchłani. Wspomnienia z Lagru*, Częstochowa–Poznań 1946,

Two years later, Zbigniew Suchocki, chairman of the Wrocław Branch of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners (PZbWP), in an article published in the association's by then Communist-dominated magazine, *Wolni Ludzie* [Free People], wrote:

> The association lends organisational form to a war previously waged in the darkness of the underground from the moment the spectre of fascism had begun to threaten Poland. This war was fought by progressive forces united around the idea of the struggle for peace and freedom, for national and social liberation, and for social justice and international solidarity. The front was everywhere the enemy was to be found. In this war, some died on the battlefields, others on city streets, still others behind the barbed wire of concentration camps. It was often a matter of pure chance on which front a person fought. The vast majority of political prisoners, before they became prisoners, had participated in the struggle against fascism.[4]

Although Kossak-Szczucka and Suchocki embraced radically different worldviews, they both saw Polish concentration camp prisoners as fighters for freedom and independence; in the face of the facts, they assumed that people had mainly been incarcerated for being members of the resistance movement. However, the authors disagreed on one important point: unlike Kossak-Szczucka, Suchocki suggested that the majority of prisoners were Communists, or at least Communist sympathisers. He regarded members of the PZbWP not only as heroes of the fight against fascism, but also as people who had played an active role in the creation of the new political system.

Although in the immediate post-war years one finds numerous examples of glorification of concentration camp prisoners, during this period their image in Poland was not yet fully consolidated. The prisoners themselves—sick, weak, and traumatised—more often than not saw themselves as victims in need of assistance. Public opinion and the state administration likewise perceived them less as returning war heroes and more as yet another problem that needed to be solved. It was not until 1948/1949 that the reality of the camps began to be seen in terms of martyrdom and heroism, and it was this interpretation that eventually took hold. Prisoners came to be portrayed almost exclusively as heroes and martyrs who had suffered and died in the name of a higher cause.[5] Thus, there emerged a symbiosis

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p. 29.

4 Zbigniew Suchocki, "Nasze zadanie—wypełnimy!", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Nov. 1948.

5 The meaning of the concept of "martyr" is aptly defined by Pieter Lagrou: "Martyrs (Gr. μάρτυρ, 'witness') are no ordinary, innocent and arbitrary victims: they suffer or die, in the original sense of early Christianity, because of their faith; their faith is both cause and effect of their suffering. Martyrs are targeted as victims of persecution because of their witnessing of their faith, but through their ordeals they also deliver the most powerful proof, or witness, of their faith." (Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, p. 211.) In the secular meaning of the word, martyrs are those who suffer and die in the name of a higher cause;

between the "national" and "Communist" narratives, although in accordance with the dominant ideology of the day, Polish prisoners were largely presented as Communists and as supporters and creators of the new system—its vanguard.

Repatriation and Assistance

In 1945, Poland was a country ruined by war and occupation, its population decimated. According to the most recent estimates, between 1939 and 1945 nearly six million citizens of pre-war Poland lost their lives during the German and Soviet occupation. Approximately half of the victims were Jews and Poles of Jewish origin.[6] Other national minorities, including Ukrainians, Belarusians and Roma, made up about one million of the victims. A large number of the murdered and fallen were members of the country's political and intellectual elites—doctors, lawyers, lecturers and clergy. Several hundred thousand people were left disabled. The material losses were also immense. As a result of hostilities and repression during the occupation, in Poland's pre-war territories alone, nearly 150,000 urban properties and over 340,000 farms were destroyed. Many industrial facilities were also devastated.

The Potsdam Agreement, concluded on 2 August 1945, ratified the shift of Poland's borders westwards; as a result, the country lost almost half of its pre-war territory and in return gained an area that was one quarter of the size of the Second Polish Republic. Border shifts, migration caused by war and occupation,

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thus their martyrdom is the result of their individual choice.

6 There are considerable discrepancies in estimates as to the number of Polish citizens who perished during the Second World War. This breakdown can therefore offer only a very approximate indication of the scale of Poland's biological losses in the years 1939-1945. The sources used are the very latest Polish publications on the subject: Mateusz Gniazdowski, "Damages Inflicted on Poland by the Germans During the Second World War: an Outline of Research and Estimates" in Witold M. Góralski (ed.) *Polish-German Relations and the Effects of the Second World War*, Warsaw 2006; Adam Eberhardt, Mateusz Gniazdowski, Tytus Jaskułowski, Maciej Krzysztofowicz, "Szkody wyrządzone Polsce podczas II wojny światowej przez agresora niemieckiego. Historia dociekań i szacunków" in Witold M. Góralski (ed.) *Problem reparacji, odszkodowań i świadczeń w stosunkach polsko-niemieckich 1944-2004*, Vol. 1, Warszawa 2004; Józef Marszałek, "Bilanse II wojny światowej" in Zygmunt Mańkowski (ed.) *Druga wojna światowa. Osądy, bilanse, refleksje*, Lublin 1996; Krystyna Kersten, "Szacunek strat osobowych w Polsce Wschodniej", *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, 2 (1994); Czesław Łuczak, "Szanse i trudności bilansu demograficznego Polski w latach 1939-1945", ibid.; Józef Marszałek, "Stan badań nad stratami osobowymi ludności żydowskiej Polski oraz nad liczbą ofiar obozów zagłady w okupowanej Polsce", ibid.

the exodus of a considerable number of the Jews who had survived the Holocaust, and the official policy of creating a nationally homogenous state, all resulted in mass population transfers. Between 1945 and 1950, 3.5 million Germans were expelled west of the Oder–Neisse line.[7] Pursuant to the agreements concluded in September 1944 between the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) and the Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, by the end of 1946, 520,000 Belarusian, Lithuanian and, above all, Ukrainian nationals had been deported from Poland. The following year, over 140,000 Ukrainians who had remained in Poland were deported to the northern and western regions of the country under Operation Vistula[8], while more than 140,000 Jews emigrated from Poland soon after the war.[9] At the same time, over 1.5 million inhabitants of the country's former Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*) as well as displaced persons from distant regions of the Soviet Union migrated to Poland.[10] In mid-1945, a stream of repatriates from Western Europe began to arrive. In total, by the end of the 1940s, approximately two million people had returned to Poland from Western and Northern Europe and from outside the continent, of whom three-quarters were forced labourers, former concentration camp inmates, and prisoners of war returning from Germany and Austria.[11] There was also significant internal migration. Between the end of the war and 1948, 2.5 million settlers migrated from Central Poland to the northern and western regions of the country.[12] This migration reached its peak between 1945 and 1947.

Reconstruction of the country after the ravages of war presented a huge challenge for the Polish authorities and Polish society alike. Mass population transfers were extremely costly and logistically complex. Concentration camp survivors were just one of many groups in need of assistance. It is impossible to state the exact number of Poles liberated from the concentration camps; however, it appears that there were relatively few compared to other groups of victims returning after the war from the territories of the Third Reich. Krystyna Kersten,

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7 Włodzimierz Borodziej, "Sprawa polska i przemieszczenia ludności w czasie II wojny światowej" in Włodzimierz Borodziej and Hans Lemberg (eds) *Niemcy w Polsce 1945-1950. Wybór dokumentów*, Vol. 1, Warszawa 2000, pp. 69, 97-98.

8 Eugeniusz Misiło, Foreword to *Akcja „Wisła". Dokumenty*, compiled idem, Warszawa 1993, p. 32

9 Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową" in Jerzy Tomaszewski (ed.) *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 405-424.

10 Jacek Borkowicz, "Wygnańcy i wypędzeni" in Włodzimierz Borodziej and Artur Hajnicz (eds) *Kompleks wypędzenia*, Kraków 1998, pp. 192-194.

11 Krystyna Kersten, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej (Studium historyczne)*, Wrocław 1974, p. 225.

12 Czesław Osękowski, *Społeczeństwo Polski zachodniej i północnej w latach 1945-1956*, Zielona Góra 1994, p. 63.

who cites the data of the Polish Government-in-Exile as well as the calculations made by the Allies in mid-1944, and who also takes into account the mass evacuations and high mortality rate in the final months of the war, estimates that the number of Polish prisoners liberated from concentration camps located outside Poland's pre-war borders was between 50,000 and 80,000.[13] Given that only some of those people decided to return to Poland, former prisoners accounted for no more than four per cent of all repatriates from the West. Even if we add the 20,000-45,000 Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust and opted to return to Poland, this proportion does not increase substantially. We should also take into account the small number of Polish citizens liberated from concentration camps located within the territory of pre-war Poland.[14] For comparison, the number of Polish forced labourers who found themselves within Nazi Germany at the end of the war was almost two million; of these, more than 400,000 were in territories that became part of Poland in 1945. Of the remaining 1.6 million labourers, over 74 per cent returned to Poland in subsequent years.[15]

Those who survived the concentration camps were not always greeted as martyrs and heroes in Poland. Indeed, former inmates of concentration camps or other camps were often not distinguished from forced labourers. All were treated equally as victims of war who needed help, but they were also considered a po-

13 Kersten, *Repatriacja*, pp. 58-59.

14 For instance, in Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau and its sub-camps, the Red Army found a total of around 10,000 prisoners left behind by the SS during the evacuation of the camps; only a small proportion of this number were Polish citizens (Józef Marszałek, *Majdanek—obóz koncentracyjny w Lublinie*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 170-176; Anna Wiśniewska and Czesław Rajca, *Majdanek. The Concentration Camp of Lublin*, Lublin 1997, p. 61; *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Węzłowe zagadnienia z dziejów obozu*, edited by Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, Oświęcim 1995, Vol. 5, p. 35—hereinafter cited after the Polish edition unless stated otherwise). In Stutthof at liberation on 8-9 May 1945 there remained no more than around 100 prisoners of the concentration camp and fewer than 20,000 civilians previously evacuated from East Prussia and Pomerania. This number also included prisoners of war and forced labourers. Stutthof lay within the pre-war boundaries of the Free City of Danzig (Konrad Ciechanowski et al., *Stutthof. Hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny*, Warszawa 1988, p. 317). On reaching the main Gross-Rosen camp on 13 February 1945, the Red Army found no prisoners. The number of prisoners liberated from Gross-Rosen sub-camps in subsequent months is not known (Isabell Spenger, "Das KZ Groß-Rosen in der letzten Kriegsphase" in Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth and Christoph Dickmann (eds) *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, Vol. 2, Göttingen 1998; Karin Orth, *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte*, Hamburg 1999, pp. 279-281).

15 Kersten, *Repatriacja*, p. 53, 57.

tential source of social problems. As Tadeusz Sas-Jaworski wrote in *Tygodnik Powszechny* within one month of the German surrender:

> Amongst the many problems which Poland must address in the near future is the return of our compatriots who worked as forced labourers in Germany during the war, and the question of 'workers from the East' passing through our country [...] from the West.[16]

The author estimated that at least 1.7 million Poles had worked in Nazi Germany:

> They are all civilians: men, women and young people—emaciated, and morally and physically shattered. Very few are capable of working straight away; the vast majority require emotional and physical healing […]. If we consider the sheer number of these unfortunate victims of war, their moral and physical state, and the conditions under which they will be travelling—to Poland or through Poland—to their families and homes, we must accept that this process will require swift and thorough preparation, and even then may give rise to many new and serious problems.

The author also stressed that people returning from the West were not the only group in need of care:

> [...] a huge wave of repatriates will soon be on the move [...] in the opposite direction, from East to West, from Transcaucasian Russia to Poland. [...] Although dealing with repatriation and transit is not beyond Poland's capabilities, it will, nonetheless, require a huge amount of work and resources and, above all, excellent, effective, and far-sighted organisation.

Contrary to modern preconceptions, concentration camp survivors were not always seen as the group most urgently requiring assistance. Reports sent in from local authorities to the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care (MPiOS) often made reference to other, more disadvantaged categories of victim. In May 1945, the Provincial Office in Kraków announced that prisoners of war were returning to the city from Hungary. These prisoners, it was emphasised, were in a far more desperate situation than the former inmates of concentration camps.[17] Three months later, there were further reports from Kraków of *Volksdeutsche* and Poles returning from distant regions of the Soviet Union to which they had been transported by the Red Army in the winter of 1945: "Diseased and emaciated, dressed in rags and frequently suffering trauma", they were often said to be in a worse condition than those "returning from the concentration camps".[18] The situation of people from the former Eastern Borderlands was also at times harder than that of repatriates from the West. Having

16 Tadeusz Sas-Jaworski, "Powrót pracowników przymusowych", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 3 Jun. 1945.

17 Officer-in-Chief of the Dept of Labour and Social Care at the Kraków Provincial Office to the Div. of Social Care at the Ministry of Labour and Social Care (MPiOS), 8 May 1945, Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN), MPiOS 386.

18 Report by the Municipal Committee for Social Welfare to the Special Commissioner for Care of Former Concentration Camp Prisoners, Kraków 3 Aug. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

left their homes in territories that were no longer part of Poland, they would sometimes wander for months in search of a roof over their head. By contrast, most of the Polish prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, with the exception of Jews, still had homes and families they could return to.

On 23 July 1944, the Soviet Army entered Majdanek. At the moment the camp was liberated there were no more than 1,500 people within its confines, mainly Soviet prisoners of war and local peasants.[19] The other prisoners had been transported in the spring and summer of 1944 to concentration camps located further to the west. Six months later, on 27 January 1945, the Soviet Army reached Auschwitz. By that stage there were barely 8,800 people within Auschwitz-Birkenau and its sub-camps—mainly Jews from various European countries[20]; all the other prisoners had been transported to the interior of Germany by the SS. Some inmates died soon after liberation. Those who managed to survive were for the most part too ill and exhausted to begin their journey home straight away. It was not until mid-February that the Soviet military authorities began to organise the first transports of former prisoners.[21] As a result, many remained in Auschwitz until the spring.[22] Hospitals run by the Red Army and by the Polish Red Cross (PCK) were established on the site of the former camp. In the first half of May 1945, approximately 1,500 patients still remained within these hospitals.[23] Other people returned home by their own means; many used Kraków as a stopping-off point.

In mid-February 1945, as the first former prisoners began to arrive from Auschwitz, a Special Commissioner affiliated to the Provincial Office in Kraków was appointed. The commissioner was charged with providing care to the former inmates

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19 Numbers of prisoners liberated from Majdanek given in the sources vary: Marszałek, *Majdanek*, pp. 170-176 (480); Wiśniewska, Rajca, *Majdanek*, p. 61 (1,500).

20 Andrzej Strzelecki, *Endphase des KL Auschwitz. Evakuierung, Liquidierung und Befreiung des Lagers*, Oświęcim 1995, p. 256; *Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. 5, p. 35.

21 Report on the scope of aid to prisoners and their families in the period 18 Jan.–22 Feb. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386. On the subject of transports of former prisoners and their vicissitudes in the first months after liberation, see also: Strzelecki, *Ewakuacja, likwidacja i wyzwolenie KL Auschwitz*, Oświęcim 1982, pp. 214-219; *Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. 5, pp. 38-40.

22 Minutes of the meeting of members of the medical and technical committee of the Commission for the Investigation of German Nazi Crimes in Auschwitz, 18 Apr. 1945, Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN), Komisja dla Badania Zbrodni Niemiecko-Hitlerowskich w Oświęcimiu 1945 r. 169/1.

23 Minutes of the meeting of the advisory committee of the Special Commission for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration and Labour Camps, 11 May 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

of Nazi concentration camps and labour camps.[24] Former inmates were to receive food and accommodation as well as a one-off cash payment of up to 500 zlotys.[25]

Meanwhile, as the Red Army advanced westwards, forced labourers and prisoners from other liberated camps in Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany began to arrive in Poland. Thus, for instance, by mid-April 1945, approximately 4,000 returnees from the West were being cared for in Kraków.[26] After the end of the war, in May 1945, a new wave of repatriates reached the city.[27] Every day, approximately 600 people arrived in need of assistance. There was a shortage of clothing and accommodation.

The central government authorities were ill-prepared to carry out a repatriation campaign or to provide care and assistance to former inmates of camps and prisons or to people returning to Poland from the territories of the Reich. The official records paint a picture of organisational chaos and indolence on the part of the state administration. Indeed, as Krystyna Kersten points out, repatriation from the West was not a priority for the Polish authorities; far greater importance was attached to the deportation of the German population, the resettlement of the northern and western regions, and the transfer of Polish nationals from the USSR.[28]

As early as in 1943, the Polish Government-in-Exile had begun negotiations with the Allies and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) on the post-war repatriation of Polish citizens.[29] The Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care (MPiOS) in London drew up a repatriation plan in 1943-1944, but it was never put into effect. On 22 July 1944, the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) was proclaimed. The committee

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24 Report on the work of the Special Commissioner for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration Camps and Labour Camps based in Kraków, 1 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 385; Minutes of the meeting of the advisory committee of the Special Commission for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration and Labour Camps, 11 May 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

25 Report on the work of the Special Commissioner for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration Camps and Labour Camps based in Kraków, 1 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 385. For comparison, in 1945, white bread cost 30 zlotys, one egg 6-7 zlotys, a litre of milk 60 zlotys, and a kilogram of meat 150-250 zlotys.

26 Report on the work of the Special Commissioner for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration Camps and Labour Camps based in Kraków, 1 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 385.

27 Ibid.; Minutes of the meeting of the advisory committee of the Special Commission for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration and Labour Camps, 11 May 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

28 Kersten, *Repatriacja*, p. 94.

29 The description of organisations and the repatriation campaign that follows is largely based on the findings of Kersten: *Repatriacja*, pp. 67-153, 207-225.

assumed control over Polish territory occupied by the Red Army. Following the establishment of the Provisional Government of National Unity (TRJN) at the end of June 1945, the United States and Great Britain ceased to recognise the Polish Government-in-Exile. However, the PKWN was completely unprepared to carry out a repatriation campaign, either as regards action to be taken in Poland or as regards coordinating the campaign with foreign institutions. The first contacts with UNRRA had been made in September 1944, but the unwillingness of the Allies to recognise the PWKN, and later the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland, meant that organisational work was delayed. The period of dual power between July 1944 and June 1945 undermined preparations for the repatriation of Poles from Western and Southern Europe.

In the spring of 1945, the Provisional Government established the Office of the General Plenipotentiary for Repatriation; in August, it was divided into two offices: the first responsible for the repatriation of Polish citizens from the West, the second for the resettlement of people returning from the Soviet Union. These offices were tasked with preparing and conducting the repatriation process until the moment the returnees were handed over to the relevant authorities on the country's borders. To this end, the office responsible for repatriation from the West established special repatriation missions in Germany, Austria, and other countries in Western and Southern Europe. The work of these missions was complicated by the fact that representatives of the new national authorities came into conflict with liaison officers loyal to the Government-in-Exile who were already stationed in those countries.

Most of the repatriation from the Soviet occupation zone of Germany was completed relatively fast—by the autumn of 1945. It was spontaneous in character, proceeding largely without the intervention of the Polish authorities or the Soviet Military Administration. The situation was somewhat different in the western occupation zones of Germany and Austria, where repatriation did not begin in earnest until the autumn of 1945. In August and September of that year, an agreement was reached between the Western Allies and the TRJN regarding the repatriation process. By that time, the repatriation of other nationalities deported to the Third Reich during the war, including French, Belgians and Dutch, was nearing completion.[30] Meanwhile, over 700,000 Polish citizens remained in camps for displaced persons; most others had returned to Poland by their own means. According to Krystyna Kersten, this delay was due to the fact that under the terms negotiated at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the repatriation of Soviet citizens had absolute priority over the repatriation of other groups of displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe. But it was also the case that the Polish authorities

30 Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, pp. 91-105.

were ill-prepared to receive such a huge number of returnees. When the first organised transports of repatriates from the western occupation zones of Germany and Austria commenced in the autumn of 1945, the Polish authorities tried at all costs to limit the number of daily arrivals. This is not because the authorities were opposed to the return of Poles from the West. On the contrary, repatriation was important to the authorities not only for propaganda but also for practical reasons: the country was in desperate need of a labour force, particularly skilled workers. In camps for displaced persons a bitter propaganda war was waged between emissaries of the Government-in-Exile, trying to persuade Poles to remain abroad, and representatives of the national authorities, who urged them to return.[31] Despite this, the repatriation points set up on Poland's borders were unable to cope with the huge volume of returnees.

Many people decided to return to Poland under their own steam, despite the difficulty and risks involved. These spontaneous migrations made it more difficult for the Polish state administration to care for and monitor returnees. In his report for May–July 1945, Tadeusz Leszczyński, the Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany, affiliated to the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care, lamented the fact that re-emigration from the West was proceeding in a haphazard fashion.[32] The registration points set up on the border were not serving their purpose, since most returnees from the West were crossing the border in other places. Leszczyński's description is confirmed by reports from the provinces. In a letter sent to the Ministry of Labour and Social Care in June 1945 from the town of Sanok in south-eastern Poland, the author complained that transfer points for people returning from forced labour and from the concentration camps had been set up exclusively on the country's western borders, whereas increasing numbers were arriving via the Vienna–Budapest–Zagórz–Sanok route. "The returnees are emaciated and completely worn out by work and by their circuitous journey home under very difficult conditions. According to information we have received from the village administrator in Zagórz, each day the local authorities in that town are burying the corpses of those who have died en route from exhaustion."[33]

Many of the returnees were detained at the border because they had no identity papers; others had had their documents stolen. The Ministry received numerous letters in which the authors claimed that they had been robbed—in most cases by the Soviet Army—whilst returning home from German captivity. "I have just

31 Kersten, *Repatriacja*, pp. 170ff.

32 Report of Tadeusz Leszczyński on the work of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany for the period 28 May–15 Jul. 1945, 26 Jul. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 389.

33 District Committee for Social Welfare in Sanok to the MPiOS, 18 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

returned from the British occupation zone of Germany. The situation there was completely fine", wrote one embittered repatriate. "At our request we were taken as far as the Elbe and handed over to the Soviets. The first thing that happened is that we were completely robbed of our better clothing and possessions, including our watches and rings. Is it so difficult to set up a few crossing points under Polish control so that our citizens can be handed over directly by the Allies and protected from plunder by marauding [Soviet] soldiers?"[34]The absence of organised transports stirred up resentment amongst former prisoners and forced labourers, strengthening their belief that no one was interested in their plight. The Polish authorities received numerous memos and complaints in this regard. "Why are they not bringing us home?", wrote one displaced person in a letter to the Polish authorities:

> That is what everyone wants and what everyone is waiting for… Why have they forgotten about us? We have nothing to do with politics because we have spent the last five and a half years in concentration camps. All we want is to return to Poland. If I were stronger, I would have returned long ago, despite the fact that it is impossible to get permission to leave on one's own accord… Everyone wants to return. The Polish authorities keep calling on us to return, but they do not say how. It is as if they have no idea about the conditions under which we are living… We sit here—tens of thousands of former concentration camp prisoners—waiting to be transported home, whilst living in abject conditions.[35]

In another letter sent from Dachau, a former prisoner wrote: "For nearly six years we longed for the war to end. And now we have been waiting two months to return, but we cannot do so because we are in foreign lands."[36]

At the same time, the Polish press often expressed concern that longer stays in camps for displaced persons led to moral decay. In an interview given in August 1946 to the *Dziennik Polski* daily, Władysław Wolski, the General Plenipotentiary for Repatriation, stated:

> At the present time, approximately half a million Poles are still in Germany. The majority are in camps where they receive accommodation and food. As most are without responsibilities or steady work, they make extra money in myriad ways: through petty trading, smuggling, or casual jobs. The lack of work, and the sense that even without it they will have enough to survive, is the reason why moral decay is spreading amongst the emigrants. Theft and robbery are commonplace. Needless to say, this state of affairs is of great concern to the Polish government.[37]

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34 Rumowska to the Minister for Social Care, 12 Jul. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 389.

35 Letter from Z. Kieresiński, Polish camp in the Boot Schule, Neustadt (Holstein) 20-21 Aug. 1945. Quoted after: Kersten, *Repatriacja*, p. 105.

36 Quoted after: Kersten, *Repatriacja*, p. 105.

37 "Polska nie wyrzeknie się nawet tych, którzy dziś nie chcą wracać do kraju. Rozmowa z Gen. Pełnomocnikiem Rządu dla Spraw Repatriacji wicem. Wolskim", *Dziennik Polski*,

The central government authorities were equally slow to provide care within Poland to former prisoners and inmates and those returning from the Reich. It was not until the beginning of February 1945—i.e. six months after the liberation of Majdanek and more than two weeks after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau—that an Interministerial Committee for the Provision of Care to Persons Liberated from Nazi Camps was formed. Yet this body did very little. Meanwhile, some of the responsibility for providing care to returnees from the West was taken on by the National Office for Repatriation (PUR), which the PKWN established in the spring of 1944. However, the PUR's main task was to organise and carry out the transfer of Poles from the Soviet Union and the deportation of Germans from Poland.

At the end of May 1945, the Council of Ministers decided that the provision of care to former camp inmates would be the responsibility of two institutions: the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care and the newly-established Committee for the Provision of Assistance to Returnees Arriving from Germany, headed by Tadeusz Leszczyński, which was affiliated to the Ministry.[38] The plan was also to set up local committees affiliated to provincial offices. Furthermore, a network of reception points and transfer points was to be established around the country, its purpose being to help returnees from the West reach their homes or find new places to settle. However, no distinction was made between concentration camp and labour camp prisoners on the one hand, and prisoners of war and forced labourers on the other. The committee's role was to oversee repatriation from the West, relieving the PUR of its duties in this regard, since the latter had failed to live up to expectations. Perhaps, as Krystyna Kersten suggests, the creation of a separate committee to aid returnees from the West was also due to the fact that the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) mistrusted the PUR, which it felt was dominated by people hostile to the new Polish authorities.[39] In practice, however, the division of responsibility between the two institutions was poorly defined. Leszczyński lacked a separate apparatus, so his work largely consisted in coordinating the activities of the PUR, local authorities, and other public institutions such as the Polish Red Cross (PCK), Caritas, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), and distributing funds, food, and

13 Aug. 1946.

38 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Poland in the matter of providing care to those returning from Nazi camps, 26 May 1945, AAN, URM 5/1097 (mcf. 23154); Excerpt from the minutes of a meeting of the Council of Ministers, 26 May 1945, AAN, Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej (MAP) 2441 (mcf. B-47169); Minutes from a conference on the subject of returnees from Germany, 28 May 1945, AAN, PUR, Wydz. Ogólny II/17.

39 Kersten, *Repatriacja*, p. 93.

other goods amongst them. Conflicts over responsibility also occurred. Both the committee and the post of Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany were abolished in the autumn of 1945[40]; their responsibilities were taken over by the National Office for Repatriation.

The campaign to assist those returning from German captivity was therefore prepared with considerable delay and, at least during the first months, was fairly chaotic, which undermined its effectiveness. As mentioned earlier, in some places where people were crossing the border *en masse*, particularly in southern Poland, there were no reception points at all.[41] The level of supplies at existing facilities varied greatly. In mid-June 1945, Tadeusz Leszczyński carried out an inspection of transfer points in western and southern Poland. He discovered that whereas in the Poznań Province help for returnees from the West was being organised relatively well—meals, coffee and dry provisions were handed out at railway stations and accommodation was available—in the Dolnośląskie Province (Lower Silesia) almost nothing had been done to prepare for the arrival of re-emigrants.[42] In other reports, complaints were made about the lack of coordination between various public institutions. The issue of organising the onward journeys of returnees to their homes gave rise to yet more problems.

The central and local authorities, aware that they were unable to shoulder the burden of providing care to those returning from German captivity, attempted from the outset to involve local communities in the campaign. As early as in February 1945, the Council of Ministers spoke of the need to organise assistance "with the cooperation of society at large", given the huge numbers of repatriates arriving in Poland.[43] The government launched a public appeal for support for former concentration camp prisoners: "The cruel fate that has befallen millions of our fellow citizens should move our conscience and awaken our hearts. Let us all stand behind the Ministry of Labour and Social Care in its campaign to help the returnees. Indifference is unacceptable."[44]

It seems, however, that despite the government's propaganda, Polish society was too absorbed with its own problems, particularly during the first months after

40 Final report on the work during the period 25 May–20 Sep. 1945 on the campaign to assist returnees from Nazi camps, 25 Sep. 1945, AAN, MPiSO 389.

41 Official letter from the District Committee for Social Welfare in Sanok, 18 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

42 Report from the tour of the Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany, Tadeusz Leszczyński, and the chief executive of the Central Committee for Social Welfare (CKOS), Adam Kuryłowicz, 10-19 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 389.

43 Minutes from the meeting of the Council of Ministers, 19 Feb. 1945, AAN, URM 5/1097 (mcf. 23154).

44 Appeal to Polish society, no date, AAN, MPiOS 386.

the war, to take an interest in the fate of the unfortunates returning from German captivity. Krystyna T., a former inmate of Ravensbrück, described her first meeting with her compatriots after crossing the Polish border in the first half of May 1945:

> We squeezed into the corridor of the railway carriage. Sitting in the compartments were fat peasant women, small-time traders. Their bundles were placed on the luggage racks above their heads. They were looters who travelled to the West to take everything they could from German homes […], so they were carrying everything they had looted. They had occupied all the compartments; there was no chance [of a seat]. Obviously they had bribed the conductors, because the trains were meant for us—the former prisoners. But there were no seats at all on those trains, so we stood in the corridor. Those peasant women didn't just eat: they stuffed their faces with hard-boiled eggs, sausage and bread. They saw the emaciated […] prisoners in their striped uniforms, their eyes burning with hunger, imploring the women to give them a piece of bread, a piece of sausage, anything. But throughout the entire length of the train, not one of them did.[45]

Official documents mention in a similar fashion, albeit using different language, the issue of the Polish population's attitude towards returnees from the Reich. At a conference on the provision of care to people arriving from the West, which took place in June 1945 in Katowice, the "complete indifference" of Polish society towards the repatriates was noted.[46] The situation in Kraków was no different. In the absence of sufficient accommodation, at a meeting in May 1945 the Special Commission for Care of Former Prisoners considered whether to appeal to the population of Kraków to provide shelter to the returnees, potentially for a fee. But the idea was dismissed as completely unrealistic.[47] In time, the situation improved slightly. During a meeting at the Provincial Office in Kraków in mid-June, one participant spoke about the dedication of the city's inhabitants, about the free meals offered by restaurants and by private individuals, about the rooms that had been made available, and about the collections of money and clothes.[48] However, it was still felt necessary to use propaganda in order to "summon up support" amongst the city's inhabitants for the campaign to assist repatriates from the West. At the end of July 1945, Tadeusz Leszczyński could state, with a degree of satisfaction, that by organising a conference with public institutions and the state administration it had been possible "to create a conducive atmosphere and raise

45 Interview with Krystyna T. conducted by the author, Warsaw, 17 Nov. 2006 (author's own recording).

46 Minutes of the conference on the provision of care to Poles returning from the West, Śląsko-Dąbrowski Provincial Office, 14 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 385.

47 Minutes of the meeting of the advisory committee of the Special Commission for Care of Former Prisoners of German Concentration and Labour Camps, 11 May 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386.

48 Report from a conference at the Dept of Labour and Social Care at the Kraków Provincial Office, 15 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 385.

public interest in the problem as a whole" and in so doing "society's complete, even harmful indifference towards the returnees" had been overcome.[49]

Yet, from the point of view of prisoners returning from the concentration camps, the help extended by public institutions and society at large remained inadequate. This is how Krystyna T., for instance, described her situation on returning to Poland:

> I went to the Red Cross [...] and all they gave me was 100 zlotys [...]. At that time, 100 zlotys... I don't know if it was even [enough to buy] a loaf of bread; it was nothing back then—a slice of wholemeal bread and a cup of bitter coffee substitute. That was all I got from the Red Cross. [...] For six weeks I went to school in my striped [concentration camp] uniform because I didn't own a skirt.[50]

In September 1946, in an article for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Maria Jezierska appealed for help to be given to camp survivors. "As for the general public, who—I want to believe—only for reasons of oversight, exhaustion, and the travails of post-war life did not give the thousands returning [from the camps] the welcome they deserved, and did not provide them with work or assistance—let them do so now."[51]

Help for former concentration camp prisoners, to the extent that it reached them at all, was only temporary in nature. Eventually, former prisoners managed to secure welfare payments, though not all were eligible. In the meantime, some of those returning from German captivity required constant medical attention and financial assistance; many, at least initially, were unable to undertake paid work. Thus, for instance, in an alarming letter sent at the end of 1945 to the Ministry of Labour and Social Care, the Provincial Office in the city of Szczecin stated that, up to the end of November, more than 12,000 people had returned to the province from German concentration camps. These people were unable to work due to extreme exhaustion and often total loss of health; over half of them required comprehensive care.[52] Maria Jezierska reported on the catastrophic physical, mental, and moral condition of people returning from the concentration camps. More than 90 per cent of them were "derelicts". She noted, in particular, their lack of respect for work:

> These people are not able to undertake any kind of work, still less to remain in work. Their will is broken, and the long months of sabotage have completely changed their

49 Report of Tadeusz Leszczyński on the work of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany for the period 28 May–15 Jul. 1945, 26 Jul. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 389.

50 Interview with Krystyna T.

51 Maria Jezierska, "Obrachunek", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 Sep. 1946.

52 Dept of Social Care at the Pomeranian Provincial Office to the MPiOS, 15 Dec. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 388.

> attitude towards work: they don't respect it and they try, as in the camps, to palm it off on to someone else; or, instead of trying to find a steady job, they simply make ends meet in a not entirely honest fashion, living as freebooters.[53]

Jezierska also mentioned the frequent cases of theft amongst former prisoners as well as drunkenness and a lack of responsibility.

For many, adjusting to life outside the camp was very difficult. This problem was raised by a former prisoner at a meeting organised in Sopot in the summer of 1945. Addressing his former camp comrades, he said:

> We are to some extent—forgive my candour, friends!—abnormal, removed from reality. During those years spent in disgusting and at times terrible conditions, cut off from culture and civilisation, we had no choice but to adjust our needs and habits to life behind a 5000-volt electric fence. As the years passed we grew numb, witnessing each day the death of yet another close friend [...]. As the years passed we got used to living without clean bedclothes, indeed without bedclothes at all. We got used to living without knives and forks, tablecloths and plates. Instead, we grew accustomed to wheezing and to being beaten with a barbed-wire whip. We grew accustomed to the starvation bunker, to the *strafkompanie* [penal work division]. Every day we looked down the barrel of a machine gun. We got used to the crematorium and the constant stench of burning human flesh. Despite those terribly difficult conditions, we now find it hard to adjust to normal, post-war life….[54]

Unfortunately, in the immediate post-war years no methodical research was done in Poland on the situation of former concentration camp prisoners. Some idea as to their state of health can be inferred from the slightly later reports produced by the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners (PZbWP). These reports should be treated with caution, however, since the association did not register patients systematically. According to data from the association's Social Welfare Council (ROS) from the first half of 1948, of the 134,000 former prisoners who were members of the association, a third suffered from various diseases.[55] The most common disease was tuberculosis.[56] More reliable information on the physical and mental condition of former concentration camp prisoners is contained in research conducted by a team of doctors and psychiatrists established in 1959 by

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53 Maria Jezierska, "Obrachunek", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1 Sep. 1946.

54 Inaugural speech of W. Lewandowski at the organisational meeting of the Association of Former Political Prisoners of Concentration Camps, dated 27 June, probably delivered on 25 Aug. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 101.

55 "Praca ROS na przestrzeni roku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 11 Apr. 1948; Report of the Executive Board (ZG) of the PZbWP to the Concessionary Council, Nov. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 38; ZG PZbWP to the Central Commission Coordinating Civic Organisations in Warsaw, 23 Sep. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 17.

56 Alina Tetmajer, "Walczymy z gruźlicą", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jan. 1948; "Działalność opiekuńcza PZbWP", *Wolni Ludzie*, 30 Jun.–15 Jul. 1949.

the psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński.[57] Tests carried out in 1964-1965 by Czesław Kempisty on 360 former prisoners from Wrocław showed that 58 per cent of them suffered from cardiovascular diseases (the national average being 4 per cent), 35 per cent from anxiety and personality disorders (national average: 4 per cent), 29 per cent from gastrointestinal diseases (national average: 11 per cent), 29 per cent from bone disease and diseases of the motor organs (national average: 10 per cent), and 19 per cent from respiratory diseases (national average: 4 per cent).[58]

Former Prisoners Organise Themselves

In light of the situation described above, it is hardly surprising that the prisoners' associations established in 1944-1945 saw the organisation of self-help to be their main purpose. The first such organisation, established as early as in 1944, was the Temporary Association of Political Prisoners of the Majdanek Concentration Camp.[59] In February 1945, barely a week after the liberation of Auschwitz, the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners from the 1939-1945 War was established in Kraków; the activities of this association extended beyond the Małopolska region.[60] Also in 1945, further independent prisoners' associations appeared in other parts of the country.[61] Some of these merged into larger struc-

57 On the subject of the work of the team under Antoni Kępiński see, inter alia: Foreword by Zdzisław Ryn to Antoni Kępiński, *Refleksje oświęcimskie*, compiled and introduced by Zdzisław Ryn, Kraków 2005, pp. 5-8; Maria Orwid, *Przeżyć... I co dalej?* Interview conducted by Katarzyna Zimmerer and Krzysztof Szwajca, Kraków 2006, pp. 159-179.

58 Czesław Kempisty, "Stan zdrowia byłych więźniów ze środowiska wrocławskiego", *Zeszyty lekarskie Oświęcim*, no. 1, Yr XXIII, series II (1967), pp. 96-98.

59 Ideological declaration appended to the statute of the Temporary Association of Political Prisoners of the Majdanek Concentration Camp in 1944, AIPN, Komenda Główna Milicji Obywatelskiej (KG MO) 35/1791.

60 Report of the Organisational Dept on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18; Interim regulations of the section for families of deceased political prisoners of the Tarnów branch of the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners from the 1939-1945 War, 14 Sep. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 153; Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners to its Śląsko-Dąbrowski provincial branch, 20 Aug. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 142; Report on the work of the PZbWP in the Pomeranian province in the years 1945-1949, 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

61 Report of the secretary of the Gdańsk branch of the PZbWP, Warsaw, 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2; Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2; Statute of the Association of Former Political Prisoners from the German Occupation of the Republic of Poland in the Years 1939-1945, AAN, PZbWP 9; A. Okręg, "Zarys powstania i działalności Związku w Poznaniu i Wielkopolsce", *Nie-*

tures, while others competed within the same territory both for new members and for access to benefits and privileges.

The associations which emerged during this period had varying profiles. Thus, for instance, the statute of the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners from the 1939-1945 War stressed the association's apolitical character, proclaiming that any former political prisoner, regardless of his or her beliefs, could become a member. The association was mainly to be involved in welfare activities; its declared purpose was to "give the widest possible moral and material assistance to former ideological and political prisoners" incarcerated by the Nazi authorities during the war, to "represent, support and defend the interests of prisoners and their families", and to "organise continuous and effective care for the widows and orphans of former prisoners".[62] These aims were to be achieved through the organisation of a self-help campaign and efforts to secure various privileges for former prisoners from the Polish authorities. The statute mentioned nothing about the association's political aims or about remembrance. The Association of Former Political Prisoners of Concentration Camps, established in Sopot in the summer of 1945, set itself similar tasks.[63] In a speech given at the association's inaugural meeting, one of its founder members stated:

> [...] our purpose is not to create another club or association, of which there are already so many, […] but to act as an organised entity in defence of our fellow comrades, who deserve to be defended and who need our help, such that they will find support, whether moral or material, in the face of adversity. [...] Of course, what we are setting up is neither a labour exchange nor an estate agency. We shall not be giving financial support to parasites and layabouts; rather, we shall be attempting, with honesty and willingness, to help those who—due to the present circumstances—cannot manage on their own.[64]

A somewhat different tone pervades the statute of the Association of Former Political Prisoners from the German Occupation of the Republic of Poland in the Years 1939-1945, established in Łódź. One of the association's tasks was to organise all former prisoners into "a single, well-disciplined and creative organisation whose principal slogan is 'The Good of the State and its Citizens'" and to "mould" its

złomni (Jednodniówka z okazji manifestacyjnego zjazdu byłych więźniów politycznych w Poznaniu 6-7.10.1946), AAN, MPiOS 321; Minutes of a meeting of the Commission for the Investigation of German Nazi Crimes in Auschwitz, 18 Apr. 1945, AIPN, Komisja dla Badania Zbrodni Niemiecko-Hitlerowskich w Oświęcimiu 1945 r. 169/1.

62 Statute of the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners from the 1939-1945 War, no date, AAN, PZbWP 9.

63 Minutes of the first organisational meeting of the Association of Former Political Prisoners of Concentration Camps for the Gdańsk province, 25 Aug. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 101.

64 Inaugural speech of W. Lewandowski at the organisational meeting of the Association of Former Political Prisoners of Concentration Camps in Sopot, dated 27 June, probably delivered on 25 Aug. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 101.

members into "selfless citizens of the state".[65] But even in the case of this association, one of the main goals was to provide help to former prisoners and their families. It seems that, irrespective of the political sympathies of their founders, prisoners' associations were created mainly in order to organise help for their members and defend their interests vis-à-vis the state administration.

In the first days of February 1946, the founding congress of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps (PZbWP) took place in Warsaw.[66] The congress was attended by representatives of prisoner organisations from all over Poland. Józef Cyrankiewicz, the then secretary-general of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), was elected chairman of the association. At the same time, the *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques* (FIAPP) was created—another Polish initiative. The federation was composed of a dozen or so prisoners' organisations from across Europe, including France, Italy, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union.[67] The Frenchman Maurice Lampe became president of the FIAPP; Cyrankiewicz became its secretary-general.

According to the account of Józef S., an association activist and cashier for the PZbWP's Executive Board, the idea of creating a national association came from a group of former prisoners from Warsaw.[68] This is confirmed by the PZbWP's own documents, which state that the association's organisational committee was established in Warsaw at the end of 1945.[69] Józef S. recounts that, initially, he and a few former camp comrades had gone to see Zenon Kliszko, then a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party (KC PPR) and also chairman of that party's caucus in the National Homeland Council (KRN). However, Kliszko rejected the idea of creating a national association of former prisoners. In the end it was Józef Cyrankiewicz and Adam Kuryłowicz, at that time chairman of the Central Committee for Social Welfare (CKOS)—both former Auschwitz inmates—who lent their support to the initiative. Józef S. suggests that the PPS leadership wanted in this way to create its own veterans'

65 Statute of the Association of Former Political Prisoners from the German Occupation of the Republic of Poland in the Years 1939-1945, AAN, PZbWP 9.

66 Report of the Organisational Dept on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18; "Ogólnopolski kongres b. więźniów zakończony. Uchwalenie deklaracji członkowskiej i wniosków—wybory władz", *Dziennik Ludowy*, 5 Feb. 1946.

67 "Des associations nationales des anciens prisonniers politiques et des délégués á la conférence des représentants des délégations nationales", no date, AAN, PZbWP 62; ZG PZbWP to the Gdańsk branch of the PZbWP, 13 May 1947, AAN, PZbWP 62.

68 Interview with Józef S., Warsaw, 10 Apr. 2006 (author's own recording).

69 Report of the Organisational Dept on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18.

association that would rival the PPR-dominated Union of Participants in the Armed Struggle for Independence and Democracy (ZUWZoNiD). The Polish Communists took a similar view. At a meeting of the Secretariat of the PPR's Central Committee convened in the first half of January 1946, hence a few weeks prior to the PZbWP's founding congress, it was suggested that the PPS was playing an important role in the preparations for the congress and that the PPR would be wrong to ignore the new organisation.[70] Consequently, it was decided to mobilise party members within the ranks of the PZbWP. The fact is that Cyrankiewicz endorsed the idea of creating the PZbWP from the very outset. Krystyna T., managing editor of the PZbWP's magazine, *Wolni Ludzie*, described Cyrankiewicz as the association's "mainstay and protector".[71] Other prominent PPS activists included the chairman of the PZbWP's Supreme Council (RN), the then Minister of Justice Henryk Świątkowski, and a few other members of the association's leadership.

The founding of the association under the auspices of the PPS and, indirectly, the increasingly powerful PPR, inevitably met with resistance from many members of organisations that were set to join the PZbWP. Aside from likely political pressure, there were also practical arguments in favour of unification. It was assumed that a large, national organisation, enjoying the support of one of Poland's governing political parties, would be better placed to secure funds and privileges for its members than would a multitude of smaller unions and associations. Thus, for instance, at a meeting of the Executive Board of the Kraków Branch of the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners convened in mid-February 1946 to decide whether to join the PZbWP, it was argued that Kraków had hitherto received no subsidies from the state.[72]

The PZbWP membership was divided into active (i.e. actual) members and passive members (i.e. dependants). According to the statute, an active member of the association could be "any citizen of Poland who, on account of his political activity, social position or nationality, was imprisoned for freedom and democracy in fascist or Nazi prisons and concentration camps and who had not sullied the good name of political prisoners".[73] Orphans and widows of murdered political prisoners were accepted as passive members of the association. It is difficult to

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70 "Protokół nr 1 z posiedzenia Sekretariatu KC PPR odbytego w dniu 12 stycznia 1946 r." in *Protokoły z posiedzeń sekretariatu KC PPR 1945-1946*, compiled by Aleksander Kochański, Warszawa 2001, pp. 153-154.

71 Interview with Krystyna T.

72 Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Board of the Kraków Branch of the Association of Former Ideological and Political Prisoners 1939-1945, 11 Feb. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 143.

73 Statute of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps (PZbWP), Warsaw 1946, AAN, PZbWP 9.

estimate, even in approximate terms, the size of the PZbWP's membership. According to various sources, it was between 100,000 and 400,000 people.[74] Even taking into account the fact that the association included not only concentration camp inmates but also people incarcerated in German prisons, the latter figure seems greatly exaggerated. This view was shared by representatives of the association's Supreme Council, who in the spring of 1948 stated that the size of the membership hitherto assumed by the Executive Board was completely unrealistic.[75] It was in the association's interest to overstate the size of its membership since this was useful when bargaining over state subsidies. However, as a result of successive attempts at political vetting, numbers steadily dwindled. According to what would seem fairly reliable data based on membership figures sent in from the provinces, in the summer of 1949 the PZbWP had over 78,000 members, of whom 33,000 were actual members, nearly 23,000 were passive members, and another 23,000 were unverified.[76]

The PZbWP's activities can be divided into three areas:

1) remembrance and transfer of knowledge about Nazi crimes,
2) political propaganda aimed at winning over association members and the wider public to the socialist system,
3) help for former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps and their families.

The PZbWP was involved in projects that included the creation of the Auschwitz Museum. Already at the founding congress, the issue of recognising the camp as a "memorial to Polish and international martyrdom" was raised.[77] Progress on the organisation of the museum was a constant concern for the PZbWP's Executive Board. Local branches of the association also made efforts to commemorate the victims of other prisons and camps, including Gross-Rosen and Stutthof. Exhibitions were held and materials published. From the spring of 1947, the PZbWP's official magazine, *Wolni Ludzie*, came out every two weeks; it contained not only

74 Report on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18; Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2; ZG PZbWP to the FIAPP, Oct. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 17; "Praca ROS na przestrzeni roku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 11 Apr. 1948; Report of the ZG PZbWP for the Concessionary Council, Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 38; ZG PZbWP to the Central Commission Coordinating Civic Organisations in Warsaw, 23 Sep. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 17; "Nowe zadania Związku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Jul. 1948.

75 Minutes of the meeting of the Supreme Council (RN) of the PZbWP, 10 Oct. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 4.

76 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

77 "Ogólnopolski kongres b. więźniów zakończony. Uchwalenie deklaracji członkowskiej i wniosków—wybory władz", *Dziennik Ludowy*, 5 Feb. 1946.

information about the association's activities, but also numerous recollections, reports on the trials of Nazi war criminals, book reviews, and polemics on issues relating to the camps. Aside from this, the PZbWP organised, at both the central and local levels, various anniversary and remembrance events; their purpose was principally to disseminate knowledge about Nazi crimes and raise funds for the association's activities. As time passed, these events increasingly took the form of political demonstrations. Participants would manifest their support for the people's government and condemn the policies of the Western allies. The *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques* (FIAPP) was also used as a forum for political agitation. At the FIAPP congress in the summer of 1947 in Warsaw, an "Appeal to All Peace-Loving Nations" was proclaimed.[78] The authors protested against the Marshall Plan and US support for the reconstruction and re-militarisation of Germany; they demanded the punishment of Nazi war criminals, the payment of reparations by Germany, and warned against Greek and Spanish fascism.

Despite the political aspirations of the association's leadership, however, the PZbWP's main aim during the first period of its existence was to organise help for its members and dependants; in this respect it was similar to the prisoner associations that had preceded it. In March 1947, the Social Welfare Council (ROS) was established; its purpose was to coordinate and streamline the self-help campaign.[79] The system of care that ROS introduced was very extensive. Members and dependants could expect to receive allowances and loans well as clothing and food; local and provincial medical centres were created, and the cost of medications, prosthetic devices and sanatorium treatment was subsidised. The PZbWP also ran its own health spas and holiday resorts. As there were many young people and children amongst the association's members and dependants, scholarships were awarded, and dormitories and orphanages created. The association organised summer camps and set up nurseries and youth clubs. The PZbWP also had workplaces where it would employ its own members. The institutions created by ROS not only provided immediate support but also played an important educational and socialising role. They helped former prisoners cope in the new post-war reality and maintain ties with their former comrades from the camps, who, on account of their shared experiences, constituted an important support group and point of reference.

It is hard to assess the actual scope and volume of support provided by ROS. For sure, it did not meet all the needs of the association's members and dependants. However, the PZbWP's data are impressive. The ROS report for the year 1947 shows that the association was running 97 youth clubs, two nurseries, 13

78 "Apel FIAPP do wszystkich narodów miłujących pokój", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Sep. 1947.

79 Report of the ZG PZbWP for the Concessionary Council, Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 38.

workplaces employing more than 600 people, and was paying out 439 regular allowances.[80] Between February and October of 1947, the association sent nearly 4,600 of its members and dependants to tuberculosis sanatoria and hospitals; more than 6,700 children went on summer camps organised by ROS, and nearly 2,400 scholarships were awarded to pupils and students. ROS covered the treatment costs of association members who were uninsured and received no state support. If the reports are to be believed, in 1947 more than 10,000 people received various kinds of medical assistance.

Such wide-ranging welfare activities were very costly. Membership fees could not significantly bolster the PZbWP's budget, and the association did not receive any regular state support either. The Ministry of Labour and Social Care provided only occasional subsidies. In December 1946, after several months of negotiation, the association secured a 25 per cent share in its revenues from licensed sales of alcohol. Such revenues had hitherto been enjoyed exclusively by the Union of War Disabled (ZIW) and the Union of Participants in the Armed Struggle for Independence and Democracy (ZUWZoNiD).[81] The ZIW was in charge of distributing the funds, which led to incessant wrangling, especially as the ZIW leadership regarded the PZbWP as something of a lesser organisation. It felt that former prisoners who had not belonged to the resistance movement could not demand the same rights as true veterans. A ZIW representative made no bones about this in a conversation with a member of the PZbWP. He admitted to having greater sympathy for the ZUWZoNiD because "not everyone [in the PZbWP] is a former political prisoner—many were put away for black market trading", while "the others [in the ZUWZoNiD] fought not only for Poland but for a new political system".[82]

In order to fill the hole in its budget, the PZbWP increasingly pursued various commercial activities, which were overseen by a specially-appointed Economic Council (RG). An important source of financing for the association was its Retail Trade Organisation (CHD). Initially, the CHD was directly owned by the PZbWP,

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80 Report of the ZG PZbWP for the Concessionary Council, Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 38; Report of the PZbWP regarding social health in 1947, no date, AAN, PZbWP 17. See also: Alina Tetmajer, "Rozwijajmy dalej naszą pracę", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Dec. 1947; Alina Tetmajer, "Walczymy z gruźlicą", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jan. 1948; "Jeszcze o stypendiach", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Feb. 1948; "Praca ROS na przestrzeni roku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 11 Apr. 1948.

81 AAN, PZbWP 38: Minutes of the meeting of the special committee to establish the percentage share in profits from the alcohol licences held by ZIW, ZUWZoNiD, PZbWP, and the Association of Veterans of the Silesian Insurrections (ZWPŚ), 12 Aug. 1946; Minutes of a joint meeting of the PZbWP, ZIW, ZUWZoNiD, 1 Dec. 1946; Minutes of a meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 21 Feb. 1947.

82 Record of a conversation between Maria Mazurkiewicz and a representative of the ZG ZIW, Col. Kiełczyński, 11 Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 38.

before being transformed into a cooperative in 1947/1948. Any adult member of the association could buy shares in the cooperative.[83] Some of the revenues were re-invested in the association's activities. The CHD ran numerous retail outlets and dining establishments as well as hotels and manufacturing plants across Poland. In mid-1948, the cooperative had 250 shops and department stores.[84] According to the account of one PZbWP member, in the Rzeszów province the CHD ran an entire chain of textile stores:

> First we obtained a licence to open textile shops. We opened a few shops in Rzeszów and in the surrounding area; in each district a new textile shop appeared. We were allocated some excellent products. Queues formed outside our shops because these were the first shops in Poland with products like that. There were four shops in Rzeszów alone. Our prisoners were employed there. The shops made a huge profit; some of it was sent to Warsaw, and the rest we kept for ourselves.[85]

The PZbWP also entered into an agreement with the Polish Tobacco Monopoly, which granted licences to association members for the sale of tobacco products.[86]

That the PZbWP prioritised welfare activities even over the commemoration of victims of Nazi crimes is shown by the fact that some former camp and prison buildings were converted into sanatoria and holiday homes for use by members and dependants of the association. The association found it difficult to obtain appropriate recreational facilities from the state. Yet, in the case of former Nazi prisons and camps—where no other use for these could be found—the association was in some sense their natural inheritor. Thus, the Palace villa, the former headquarters of the Gestapo in the town of Zakopane, was converted into a sanatorium for former prisoners.[87] Similar plans were laid for Stutthof, where the association had initially planned to create a sanatorium or orphanage, and later a summer camp centre and shelter, for members and dependants of the association.[88] In the

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83 "CHD przekształca się w spółdzielnię", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jan. 1948.

84 ZG PZbWP to the MPiOS, Aug. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 17; "Nowe zadania Związku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Jul. 1948.

85 Account given by Stanisława Imiołek, Collections of the Karta Centre, ISFLDP 058, transcription of the interview, p. 19.

86 Directorate of the Polish Tobacco Monopoly to ZIW, ZUWZoNiD, PZbWP, 14 Dec. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 38.

87 "Palace—Sanatorium pracy", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jan. 1948; "Praca ROS na przestrzeni roku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 11 Apr. 1948; "Działalność opiekuńcza PZbWP", *Wolni Ludzie*, 30 Jun.–15 Jul. 1949.

88 AAN, Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki (MKiS), Centralny Zarząd Muzeów (CZM), Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31: PZbWP Branch Executive Board in Gdańsk to the Provincial Land Office (copy), 18 Apr. 1946; PZbWP Branch Executive Board in Gdańsk to the Provincial Property Management Board (copy), 29 Aug. 1946; ZG PZbWP to the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation affiliated to the MKiS, 30 Sep.

end, however, these plans were abandoned. It was felt that Stutthof was not an appropriate location for a sanatorium on account of the "unpleasant memories the place could evoke".[89] In Auschwitz, too, there was a plan to convert some of the buildings of the original camp, the so-called *Lagererweiterung* ("camp extension")[90], into a complex of vocational schools for orphans of concentration camp prisoners. This "city of boys", as it was once called, was to constitute "a living monument" to martyrdom.[91] Such a utilitarian approach to martyrdom sites may in retrospect seem surprising, even inappropriate, but it was dictated by the harsh realities of the post-war period. In the second half of the 1940s, the idea of creating "living monuments" was quite popular in Poland and was not only applied to the remnants of former concentration camps and prisons.[92]

Politicisation of the PZbWP

At the end of December 1947, an article appeared in *Wolni Ludzie* by the then deputy chairman of the PZbWP, Bernard Fuksiewicz, who reported on a dispute that had arisen at the most recent congress of delegates from the association's provincial branches. The dispute centred on the Executive Board's support for the politicisation of the organisation. The author himself held the view that the PZbWP could no longer restrict itself to self-help campaigns and should assume a more explicitly ideological and political profile. "We must abandon all this 'victimhood'", he exhorted readers:

> To grant special rights to all former prisoners just because they spent time in a prison or concentration camp would relegate us to the status of professional "martyrs"; it

1946. Minutes of the meeting of the PZbWP Medical Committee, 31 Oct. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 33; PZbWP Branch Executive Board in Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP, 24 Feb. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

89 Minutes of the meeting of the PZbWP Medical Committee, 31 Oct. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 33. AAN, PZbWP 108: ROS to the ZG PZbWP, 16 Jul. 1947; Report on the inspection of the campaign to dispose of former German property in the former Stutthof concentration camp, no date.

90 The camp extension constituted 20 buildings erected in the years 1942-1944 on the premises of the main camp. These are currently military barracks and private homes. Very few people know that these buildings were constructed while the camp was still in operation (*Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. 1, pp. 58-59).

91 Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp at Auschwitz, no date, AAN, PZbWP 13; "Oświęcim w krwi i walce. Jak będzie wyglądało muzeum", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947; Stanisław Stomma, "Problem Oświęcimia", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 6 Jul. 1947.

92 Irena Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 43-45.

> would create a new "brigade" that seeks privileges for itself, whereas we, former political prisoners, only want support to be given to those who really need and deserve it. We see ourselves neither as "worthies" nor as "whingers", but rather as people who are shouldering a new and heavy burden, namely, the reconstruction of our country and the struggle for our ideals, in other words, the struggle against fascism, the struggle for peace, and the struggle for a better future for the nation, the state, and humanity.[93]

In Fuksiewicz's view, the politicisation of the PZbWP was an inevitable consequence of the fact that the association brought together those who had "resisted the Nazi occupation of Poland" and "the Nazi world-view", and who had "joined the struggle for national liberation, for freedom and human rights, and for a brighter future for humanity". Although he conceded that the participants of these struggles had a variety of political beliefs, they were united by the idea of the struggle against fascism, in which "minor differences in the programmes of political parties" lost their significance.

Fuksiewicz's article was the first in a series of texts published in *Wolni Ludzie* whose purpose was to persuade readers of the need for greater involvement in current political matters. Although the authors of these texts understood that in the immediate post-war years the main reason for joining the association had been the opportunity to meet people who shared similar experiences, with whom one could remember the injustices of the past, equally they felt that to wallow in suffering was "senseless and futile".[94] Former prisoners, they believed, should cease to be a burden on society, return to normal life, and join in the reconstruction of the country.[95]

From the moment the PZbWP was created, attempts were made to transform it into a political rather than a self-help organisation. Already at the congress of delegates of prisoners' associations convened two weeks prior to the PZbWP's founding congress, Józef Cyrankiewicz feared that the new association might become "yet another organisation that exists at society's expense".[96] According to Cyrankiewicz, the PZbWP's main task was to bear witness to Nazi crimes and prevent the renaissance of German imperialism. At the PZbWP's founding congress, one of the association's leaders declared that former prisoners did not wish to be perceived merely as "hapless victims of the camps"; they wished to become "the vanguard of the struggle against fascism and reactionary forces".[97] Despite this, as mentioned earlier, the association initially focused on welfare work, and its leadership, especially at the local level—despite the strong position

93 Bernard Fuksiewicz, "Nasze zadania", *Wolni Ludzie*, 19-31 Dec. 1947.

94 "Nowe zadania Związku", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Jul. 1948.

95 Ibid. Cf. also: Krystyna Żywulska, "Sprawy najważniejsze", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-30 Dec. 1948; idem, "Nasz głos", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Apr. 1949.

96 Report from the congress of presidents and delegates of former political prisoners' organisations, 10 Jan. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 1.

97 "B. więźniowie awangardą walki z faszyzmem. Rezolucje kongresu b. więźniów politycznych obozów niemieckich", *Życie Warszawy*, 6 Feb. 1946.

of the PPS—comprised people of divergent world-views. The political offensive did not begin until mid-1947. From that moment onwards, the PZbWP gradually evolved from an association of victims into a veterans' organisation with a strong ideological profile, whose main purpose was to lend support and legitimacy to the new system. Simultaneously, efforts were made to cleanse the ranks of the organisation of "profiteers and reactionary and non-ideological elements".[98] This transformation was accompanied by a change in the image of the political prisoner, who metamorphosed from a victim of Nazi barbarity into a hero of the anti-fascist resistance movement and the personification of the new system's vanguard.

Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners: "[As] free [citizens] we are building the People's Poland" (Wolni Ludzie*, 15 April 1949)*

At the end of May 1947, the first major purges took place amongst the PZbWP's leadership. Much of the Executive Board was replaced following accusations of poor and disorganised management on the part of the association's members,

98 Report of the PZbWP for the year 1947 for the Concessionary Council, no date, AAN, PZbWP 17.

including the secretary-general, Czesław Łęski, and his deputy.[99] At a meeting of the Supreme Council, participants openly expressed their suspicions that the attacks on the Executive Board had been politically motivated. It was pointed out that those who had been dismissed were either members of the Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) or had no party affiliation. The Monitoring Committee was accused of bias. Despite the changes, however, the PPR remained in a minority within the association's leadership. As shown by a list drawn up between May 1947 and December 1948, of the 15 members of the Executive Board, five belonged to the PPS, three to the PPR, and one to the Peasants' Party.[100] As one member of the PPR caucus within the PZbWP's Executive Board stated in November 1948, "… on 1 January [of this year], on the premises of the Executive Board, members of our party were still being treated like the NKV[D]".[101] He continued: "Currently, the situation has radically improved. Although we still have only a few members of our party on the Executive Board, they hold the top positions." He optimistically concluded: "We can safely say that, thanks to the supremacy of the PPR, we are responsible for the association's overall policy, and this is our undoubted success."

Once the first personnel changes in the association's Executive Board had been made, efforts turned towards cleansing its local structures. As evidenced by a list found in the PZbWP's documentation, in 1946 12 per cent of the association's leaders at the local and provincial level were members of the PPR; in the following year this figure had risen to one-fifth, and by 1948 every third member of the association's leadership belonged to the PPR.[102] After the creation of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in December 1948, almost all the chairmen and deputy chairmen of the executive boards of the PZbWP's provincial branches were party members.[103] The situation was similar in local branches. The infiltration of the association by the PPR is illustrated by the example of the Kraków Branch: data from March 1948 show that of the eleven members of the Kraków Branch's Executive Board, only one was a member of the PPR and another was a member of the Democratic Party (SD), which was affiliated to the PPR.[104] By

99 Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP, 28 May 1947, AAN, PZbWP 4; Minutes of the meeting of the ZG PZbWP, 31 May 1947, AAN, PZbWP 5; Report of the Organisational Dept on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association in 1945 to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18.

100 Personnel of the ZG PZbWP leadership, no date, AAN, PZbWP 11.

101 Minutes of a meeting of the PPR caucus in the ZG PZbWP, 4 Nov. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

102 Data on the PZbWP leadership in the various districts, no date, AAN, PZbWP 11.

103 Leadership personnel lists for the local and district branches of the PZbWP, no date, AAN, PZbWP 11.

104 Leadership personnel list for the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP, 31 Mar. 1948 (Branch leadership appointed 27 Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 144.

mid-1949, six members of the PZPR and one member of the SD already sat on the Executive Board.[105] In the spring of 1948, the chairman of the Kraków Branch's Executive Board was still a person without party affiliation. Barely six months later, the post of chairman and two of the posts of deputy chairman were taken by members of the PZPR; a third deputy chairman belonged to the SD.

The resistance to the PPR's policy amongst Kraków's ex-prisoner community is illustrated by the conflict that arose during a meeting of the PZbWP's Kraków Branch at the end of June 1947 between the PPR activist Jan Chlebowski and the chairman of the PZbWP's local branch in Tarnów, Antoni Gładysz. Chlebowski attacked the Tarnów Branch for its alleged reactionary attitude. Gładysz countered: "The Tarnów Branch does indeed have a reactionary attitude, but in regard to people of the calibre of Mr Chlebowski. You [Chlebowski] are pursuing your destructive activities amongst people who are working for the good of the state. [...] Indeed, before the war you spent your time smashing windows."[106] A *Tygodnik Powszechny* journalist and former Ravensbrück prisoner, Eugenia Kocwa, also came out in support of Gładysz. She said that Chlebowski was trying to frighten the participants and that his speech proved he understood nothing about democracy. Despite Chlebowski's attacks, Gładysz joined the Kraków Branch's new Executive Board, which was appointed at the same meeting. The methods by which Communists often forced through their own candidates is also illustrated by the confrontation which took place at a general meeting of the PZbWP's local branch in Nowy Sącz in March 1949. The minutes of the meeting show that a list of candidates for the branch's Executive Board suddenly appeared on the chairman's table. The list, however, was rejected by those present. A committee was appointed and ordered to draw up a new list of candidates. In response, a PZPR representative present at the meeting demanded to attend the committee's session, stating that he had to "review the proposed list of candidates to the branch's new Executive Board".[107] This demand was refused by the other participants, as a result of which, at the request of a delegate from the provincial branch, the meeting was closed.

Despite resistance, the efforts to foist the correct ideological line upon the Kraków Branch proved successful. According to the account of a Kraków Branch delegate to the PZbWP's National Congress in July 1949, the association's leadership in the Kraków province at the provincial and local level had initially been

105 AAN, PZbWP 144: Leadership personnel list for the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP, 1 Oct. 1948 (Branch leadership appointed 26 Sep. 1948); Leadership personnel list for the Krakow Branch of the PZbWP, 30 Jun. 1949.

106 Minutes of the PZbWP Branch congress for the Kraków province, 29 Jun. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 143.

107 Minutes of the general meeting of the Nowy Sącz local branch of the PZbWP, 27 Mar. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 153.

composed of people with inappropriate political views, PSL sympathisers and right-wing National Democrats (*endecja*), who had steered the organisation in a direction that was "inconsistent with the current system". However, after a few colleagues had managed, "in the face of resistance from others", to gain their first foothold in the Kraków Branch's Executive Board in 1947, the situation slowly began to improve. By 1948, the delegate concluded, people "with views very similar to our own, and with an ideological and political attitude that nowadays should be mandatory" had joined the Kraków Branch's Executive Board".[108]

These personnel changes were accompanied by purges amongst the PZbWP's rank and file. Political vetting was conducted from the moment the association was established until its eventual dissolution. The main purpose of vetting was to exclude from the ranks of the PZbWP people who had given false details about the time they or a family member had spent in a prison or concentration camp. Another important criterion of entry into the PZbWP was that the candidate should not have "sullied the good name of political prisoners" whilst in captivity.[109] Initially, the main purpose of this rule was to exclude from the association persons who had participated in crimes during their captivity, such as the denunciation, murder, or ill-treatment of other prisoners. The disclosure of such cases led to the removal of a great many people from the association, a process aided by the robust vetting procedure. This included everything from the mandatory submission of character references from two former camp comrades who were existing members of the association to the publication of lists of candidates in the *Wolni Ludzie* magazine.

Over time, however, vetting was used as a means of removing politically suspect people from the association. An instruction sent in February 1948 from the Central Committee of the PPR to the PPR's caucus within the PZbWP's Executive Board stated that the recent elections to the PZbWP's provincial branch authorities had displayed "an insufficient influence of democratic elements".[110] Consequently, the PPR Central Committee recommended that vetting be intensified in order to cleanse the association of "elements that have nothing to do with the term 'political prisoner'". First in the firing line would be members of local and provincial branch authorities and delegates to the national congress. It was recommended that the vetting committees be filled with PPR members.

At the turn of 1947/1948, members were vetted once again. The aim this time was to eliminate from the association all potential opponents of the new system. At the local vetting committee briefings, it was explicitly stated that "current

108 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

109 PZbWP statute, Warsaw 1946, AAN, PZbWP 9.

110 Central Committee (KC) of the PPR to the PPR caucus in the ZG PZbWP, 12 Feb. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

political issues" should also be taken into account when vetting candidates.[111] As one delegate to the PZbWP congress in the summer of 1949 candidly explained: "…we're not saying that this is a purge, but we would very much like each member to have an appropriate class background…".[112]

Some association activists, however, advocated greater prudence when removing politically suspect individuals from the PZbWP, since they feared it could decimate the association's membership. They opposed treating all non-party individuals as a "reactionary element"; some, they felt, could still be brought over to the Communists' side.[113] One of the speakers at the PZbWP's national congress in July 1949 warned the audience: "we won't achieve anything […] through coercion […] as endorsed by some of our colleagues, who say that we have carried out a purge and gotten rid of the parasites, that the situation has improved because we have come to terms with the party, that this is all the party's work".[114] There was no doubt, he continued, that "our party is quite rightly the preeminent force today—that is obvious and it is no secret—but we must learn from our great leaders [...], from our vanguard which holds the reins of government, that no individual should be ruthlessly eliminated just because he does not belong to the party or appears to hold reactionary views. We should not be adopting such an unyielding approach to these individuals in order to remove them from the movement and from public life. And especially not as far as our association is concerned, since our membership is necessarily limited. Our numbers are never going to rise, only diminish. But if we abandon the idea of love for one's neighbour, the idea of civic education, which the Executive Board continually reminds us about, then we will be left without any members at all." In response to these concerns, the then secretary-general of the association, Józef Passini, explained that it was not important whether a member of the association belonged to the party or had no party affiliation, whether he was secular or religious; what was important was that he should be progressive.

Vetting did not only serve to exclude politically suspect people from the association; changes in the PZbWP's entry criteria also affected the organisation's profile. The decision to admit into the association only those people who had been incarcerated in German prisons and concentration camps, and not, for instance, in penal or labour camps, was arbitrary and masked a number of inconsistencies. It

111 Minutes of the meeting of chairmen of the vetting committees for local groups in the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP, 6 Mar. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 151.

112 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

113 Minutes of the meeting of the PPR caucus in the ZG PZbWP, 4 Nov. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

114 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

seems that the decision to distinguish inmates of Nazi prisons and concentration camps from other groups of victims was founded on the belief that the conditions prevailing in prisons, and especially in concentration camps, were substantially worse than in other German camps.[115] In practice, however, such a distinction was inadequate. In the spring of 1947, for instance, the PZbWP's Central Vetting Committee received a letter from the PZbWP's local branch in Kraków asking whether people who had been incarcerated in Płaszów, Skarżysko-Kamienna and Częstochowa could be admitted to the association.[116] Although, the author of the letter argued, these were formally labour camps, the conditions there were especially harsh and comparable to those of the concentration camps. Perhaps to avoid these and similar questions, at the end of July 1947 the Central Vetting Committee sent out a circular in which it listed 100 camps whose former inmates would be eligible for membership in the PZbWP.[117] The list also included a few labour camps, including Płaszów and Poniatowa.[118]

The second and probably decisive reason why entry into the association was open solely to former inmates of German prisons and concentration camps, and among them only those deemed to be political prisoners, was the belief that, unlike other categories of prisoner—*Berufsverbrecher* (career criminals) or *Asoziale* ("asocials")[119], for instance—they had been persecuted for "freedom and democracy".[120] Thus, it was assumed that political prisoners were those who had been sent to the camps for being members of the Polish resistance movement, and that therefore, as heroes and martyrs of the struggle against fascism, they deserved society's gratitude and respect. Although the repression suffered by other prisoners had also been an aspect of Nazi occupation policy and had at times been equally severe, it was felt that such repression did not grant an entitlement to special privileges or benefits. In this way, the Central Vetting Committee to some extent duplicated the Nazi classification

115 For obvious political reasons, prisoners of Soviet camps could not be accepted into the PZbWP.

116 Zofia Mączka of the Vetting Committee of the PZbWP local branch in Kraków to the Central Vetting Committee (GKW), 9 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 151. Płaszów: Nazi labour camp established in the summer of 1942; in January 1944 it became a concentration camp. Used to incarcerate mainly Jews and Roma. In July 1943 part of the camp was designated as a penal camp for Poles.

117 Circular no. 1 from the GKW to the executive boards of the PZbWP branches, 31 Jul. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28.

118 Poniatowa: Labour camp for Jews administered by the SS. Operational in the years 1942-1943.

119 On the subject of categorisation of prisoners by the SS, see: Annette Eberle, "Häftlingskategorien und Kennzeichnung" in Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Diestel (eds) *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, München 2005.

120 PZbWP statute, Warsaw 1946, AAN, PZbWP 9.

system, which had often proved inadequate in practice. First and foremost, the Nazis had classified as political prisoners not only those who had been incarcerated for their resistance activity but also those who had been detained pre-emptively, such as the professors of the Jagiellonian University and Academy of Mining in Kraków arrested in November 1939 and many others sent to camps in the first months of the war, as well as hostages and other people arrested during round-ups and other repressive measures. The Nazis had also classified as political prisoners the civilian population of Warsaw during the 1944 Uprising, as well as those who had been sent to the camps during the forced expulsions from the Zamość region at the turn of 1942/1943.[121] The PZbWP statute left much unsaid in this regard. On the one hand, it stated that a member of the association could be any citizen of Poland who had been "imprisoned for freedom and democracy in fascist or Nazi prisons and concentration camps"; on the other, it recognised not only those who had been arrested for "political activity", but also those who had been incarcerated for their "social position" or "nationality"[122], as eligible for membership. Was it the case, therefore, that a person arrested "accidentally" during a round-up had been imprisoned for "freedom and democracy"? Another dilemma was whether to admit Jews into the association, since the Nazis had not usually classified Jews as political prisoners. This issue is discussed in the next chapter.

In subsequent years, the wording of the statute concerning the association's admission rules was continually amended; it was also a subject of debate amongst the ex-prisoner community. The Central Vetting Committee's rules and regulations from June 1946 specified the reasons for arrest that permitted membership in the PZbWP. In particular, the following persons were eligible to become members of the association:

a) persons incarcerated for activities within underground political, military, social or educational organisations,
b) persons incarcerated on account of their nationality, whether Polish, Jewish, etc., provided that the period of captivity had lasted at least three months (local vetting committees could waive this requirement under special circumstances),
c) hostages (subject to point b).[123]

These admission rules, however, led to much uncertainty and misunderstanding. For this reason, as is shown by reports sent in to the Executive Board, during the

121 *Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. 2, p. 22.
122 PZbWP statute, Warsaw 1946, AAN, PZbWP 9.
123 Regulations of the GKW PZbWP, 21 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 28.

first phase of the association's existence the vetting procedure was fairly chaotic, with branch committees applying varying criteria.[124]

It was not until the second half of 1947 that the Central Vetting Committee decided to specify the association's admission criteria in more precise terms. It clarified the circumstances under which local and branch committees could waive the requirement of a minimum of three months in captivity.[125] This requirement would no longer apply to candidates who had been arrested less than three months prior to the end of the occupation, who had escaped from captivity, or who had acted particularly honourably whilst incarcerated in a prison or concentration camp, such as by being involved in the resistance movement or by helping their comrades in other ways. In another instruction sent out in December 1947, the Central Vetting Committee stipulated that membership in the PZbWP was open not only to those who could prove that they had been a member of a specific underground organisation, but also to those who had operated outside clandestine structures to the detriment of the occupying forces. The committee advised special caution in the case of people who had been arrested during a round-up or other random event not directly related to the struggle with the enemy, and in the case of candidates who had been taken hostage. Such people would need to demonstrate that they had adopted a patriotic attitude during the occupation. Their membership application would need to be accompanied by a CV describing their fortunes from the outbreak of war until the moment of arrest. The CV would also need to include information on the person's involvement in the resistance movement or an explanation as to why they had not been involved. If a candidate could not demonstrate their involvement in clandestine activity, stated the instruction sent out to branch vetting committees, the committee should take into account the date of arrest. If the arrest took place after 1 January 1943, "in other words, at a time when the struggle against the enemy, in all its forms, had engulfed the entire country, then the candidate's complete passivity should be properly understood as an indifference to the cause of liberation. Such a candidate, since he does not bear the hallmarks of an ideological or political prisoner, cannot in principle be admitted to the association. The committee may waive this rule if it is shown that the candidate, due to his personal circumstances (for instance, old age), pre-war activities or position, or on account of local conditions, etc., could not have participated in clandestine activity or in work for the good of the Polish nation, or

124 See, inter alia: Reports of the branch vetting committees to the GKW, AAN, PZbWP 18; Report of the Executive Board of the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP to the III congress of the Kraków Branch, 29 Jun. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 143; Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

125 Circular no. 1 from the GKW to the executive boards of the PZbWP branches, 31 Jul. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28.

that such participation would have been especially difficult."[126] The rule was to apply equally to civilians caught up in the Warsaw Uprising. Civilians sent to concentration camps during the Warsaw Uprising, stated an article published in the summer of 1948 in *Dziennik Zachodni*, were generally treated only as "victims of war".[127] The PZbWP would only admit those people who could prove that they had been active in the resistance movement prior to their arrest or during their time spent in a concentration camp. As the above description shows, the PZbWP's admission criteria became increasingly rigorous. According to the Central Vetting Committee's instruction of December 1947, in practice the only people eligible for membership in the PZbWP were those who in some way, whether in captivity or not, had been active in the resistance movement, even if this had not been the direct cause of their arrest. Thus, at least formally, the PZbWP was gradually transformed from an association of victims into a veterans' organisation.

The introduction of stricter admissions criteria by the PZbWP's Central Vetting Committee gave rise to numerous controversies amongst the ex-prisoner community. The authors of some branch vetting committee reports complained that the majority of candidates believed that they were entitled to become members of the PZbWP just by virtue of having been in a concentration camp or prison. The authors of other reports suggested that the vetting procedure ought to focus less on the reasons for arrest and more on the candidates' conduct during captivity and their current political views. As late as in the summer of 1949, one delegate to the PZbWP's national congress complained that the Central Vetting Committee's instructions were exceptionally complex and "rigorous", which slowed the vetting process considerably and restricted the association's membership.[128]

The PZbWP's admissions criteria, and thus the very identity of political prisoners, were also debated in *Wolni Ludzie*. In the spring of 1948, the magazine published an article by Bolesław Rozmarynowicz, the deputy chairman of the Kraków Branch's Executive Board, in which the author analysed the association's membership criteria in detail. "We have received comments from various quarters," wrote Rozmarynowicz, "such as 'your association also has members who had nothing to do with politics' or 'I know people who should not be in the association because they stood apart from politics when they were in the camp' [...] That even members of the association are confused by this state of affairs is evidenced by the motion put forward at the General Assembly of one of the most important local

126 Instruction for vetting committees of local groups and branches of the PZbWP, 1 Dec. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28.

127 "Kto ma prawo należenia do Związku b. Więźniów Politycznych", *Dziennik Zachodni*, 14 Jul. 1948.

128 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

branches, namely, that we should create a separate Political Prisoners' Section."[129] Rozmarynowicz felt that this was the wrong approach. According to him, political prisoners were not only those who had ended up in captivity due to their clandestine activities, but also hostages, "provided there is no doubt that the arrest of the persons concerned and their incarceration in a prison or concentration camp was done for political reasons", and all those who had been the victims of political repression by the Nazis against the Polish population. Rozmarynowicz believed that the most contentious category was that of persons who had been rounded up on the street and subsequently sent to a concentration camp. Such actions, he argued, were not always political in nature, and in some cases were designed to target the black market, pedlars, etc. "It will thus be necessary to consider, in each case, whether the motive for a particular action perpetrated by the occupying forces was essentially political in nature." Rozmarynowicz suggested, therefore, that the motive by which the occupying forces had been guided, and not the candidate's actual involvement in underground activity, should be seen as the basis for admission to the association. He regretted the fact that the rules contained in the PZbWP's statute and in the Central Vetting Committee's instructions were ambiguous and inconsistent in this regard. As a result, vetting committees were often forced to follow their own intuition, which meant that different criteria were applied across local and provincial branches: "some committees were very strict, while others resolved matters with a 'broad brush'". The Central Vetting Committee, Rozmarynowicz concluded, should therefore strive to standardise the vetting procedure.

A short note appeared in the next issue of *Wolni Ludzie* from the magazine's editor-in-chief, Andrzej Kobyłecki. He reminded readers that not all people whom the Nazis had categorised as political prisoners were imprisoned for their activities in the resistance movement. Many had ended up in the camps "accidentally" or through sheer recklessness: "That we so often boast about our experience of the camps and highlight its importance creates a fertile ground for weeds. We all know that being sent to prison or camp was nothing to be proud of. It was sometimes just a matter of coincidence or—let's be frank—all too often the result of recklessness or even stupidity. That is why we former political prisoners should not take any credit for the very fact of having been in a Nazi concentration camp, and none of us should be treated by society as an especially worthy person or as a professional 'martyr' who takes advantage of his status."[130] It was precisely this sort of reasoning, argued Kobyłecki, that informed the PZbWP's admission

129 Bolesław Rozmarynowicz, "Więzień Polityczny (artykuł dyskusyjny)", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 May 1948.

130 Andrzej Kobyłecki, "To, że ktoś trafił do obozu nie jest niczyją zasługą...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Jun. 1948.

policy, since the Central Vetting Committee took into account a candidate's "pre-camp activities" above all else.

Kobyłecki's article prompted a storm of protest amongst readers. In a letter published in a subsequent issue of the magazine, a former Stutthof prisoner, Jan Rompski, expressed his outrage at the editor's suggestion that those who had been sent to the camps not for their resistance activities but as a result of "coincidence" should no longer be seen as political prisoners.[131] Irrespective of the reason for arrest, argued Rompski, the association could not deny help to people who had suffered physical or psychological harm whilst in a concentration camp which had left them, for instance, unable to work. The vetting committee should, therefore, focus solely on whether a given person had indeed been an inmate of a concentration camp and whether he had behaved in an appropriate manner.

In his response, published in the next issue of the magazine, Kobyłecki wrote that it was necessary to face the truth that most people had ended up in the camps by accident. Yet even those incarcerated for their activities in the resistance movement had nothing to be proud of. Being sent to a concentration camp had to be considered a failure. The Germans arrested members of the underground in order to render them harmless, and in most cases they succeeded. Indeed, very few camps had an organised resistance movement. This was limited to "very few individuals, with the exception of two camps: Buchenwald and Auschwitz, where the resistance movement was more organised. The reason is that in most camps the vast majority of inmates were not drawn from the ranks of freedom fighters, but were instead people who had ended up there by accident, even by mistake. Those who knew the reason for their incarceration were in a small minority. [...] For the mass of inmates, resistance simply meant staying alive, almost at any cost."[132] Therefore, argued Kobyłecki, "none of us should see our time in the camp as something to be proud of because […] a lost battle is never deserving of praise; it is merely the result of coincidence of one sort or another. However, incarceration was certainly an injustice done to us by the enemy. And there is no doubt that such an injustice ought to be remedied as far as is possible." For this reason, one of the tasks of the PZbWP should be to "remedy, where possible, the injustices suffered by concentration camp victims—perhaps by intensifying the programme of social care". Thus, Kobyłecki de facto deprived political prisoners in general of their hero status, granting them in return the right to claim welfare payments, understood as compensation for their suffering. At the same time, however, he avoided answering the crucial question of who was entitled to belong to the association—only those who had "lost" the battle or also those who had not even participated

131 Jan Rompski, "Czy istotnie 'splot okoliczności'?", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Jul. 1948.

132 Kobyłecki, "Czy istotnie 'splot okoliczności'? W odpowiedzi kol. Rompskiemu", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Aug. 1948.

in it and had ended up in the camps "by accident". What is most surprising about the article is that Kobyłecki reinforced—contrary to the official policy of the PZbWP's leadership and initially, it would seem, contrary to his own intentions—the image of the association as a repository of victims and "whingers", but not of heroes. Soon afterwards, Kobyłecki left the editorial board of *Wolni Ludzie*.

At the turn of 1947/1948, in parallel to the political purges and changes in admissions criteria, a campaign was launched to close down more PZbWP-run enterprises on the pretext of cleansing the association of "profiteers". Finally, in October 1948, the Supreme Council passed a resolution to disband the Retail Trade Organisation (CHD).[133] The background to these developments was the "struggle for trade", which was conducted across Poland from the spring of 1947, and which in 1948 also led to the nationalisation of the co-operative sector. The claim that association structures were being used for personal enrichment was also often used as an argument to allow the association to rid itself of politically inconvenient members. In this regard, no distinction was made between "reaction" and "profiteering". This is well illustrated by a statement made in October 1947 by the chairman of the PZbWP's Supreme Council: "There is no place in the association for reactionary elements and they must be eliminated. The association cannot allow itself to be used to further private interests."[134] Another step towards transforming the association from a self-help organisation into a political organisation was the dissolution of the Social Welfare Council (ROS) at the beginning of 1949 and its replacement by a Social Welfare Department directly subordinate to the PZbWP's Executive Board.[135] Perhaps one of the reasons for the dissolution of the ROS was that—as one member of the Basic Party Cell (POP) within the PZbWP's Executive Board stated in October 1948—the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) had failed to take control of the Council.[136] In any case, limiting the association's welfare activities was in line with the general policy of the Executive Board.

133 Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP, 10 Oct. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 4; "Ważne uchwały Rady Naczelnej", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-30 Oct. 1948.

134 Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP, 10 Oct. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 4.

135 Report of the Organisational Dept on the work of the PZbWP for the period from the establishment of the association to 30 Jun. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18.

136 Minutes of the meeting of the PPR caucus in the ZG PZbWP, 28 Oct. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

The Struggle against "Victimhood"

The personnel and organisational changes within the association were accompanied by a propaganda campaign under the slogan of "the struggle against victimhood". Pressure was put on the PZbWP's local and provincial branches to limit self-help activities and place greater emphasis on ideological work. The fact that these changes were initiated by Communists is shown by an instruction sent in mid-February 1948 from the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) to the PPR caucus within the PZbWP's Executive Board. Aside from a directive to intensify the vetting campaign, the instruction also recommended stepping up propaganda in order to convince the ex-prisoner community of the need to combat the moral consequences of the occupation by "disseminating pride about [Poland's] victory, awareness of the nation's strength, and optimism about the future".[137] We should not "foster an atmosphere of mourning", the instruction continued. "The commemoration of victims of Nazi terror should be kept within reasonable limits and should focus on valour, and not suffering; political prisoners should not be treated as 'priests of martyrdom' but rather as conscious and active members of society".

Pressure was also brought to bear on the editorial board of *Wolni Ludzie*. Already at the session of the Presidium of the PZbWP's Executive Board in September 1947, an accusation was made that the magazine devoted too much space to "martyrdom" and not enough to texts that could give the magazine a "clear ideological direction".[138] During 1948, *Wolni Ludzie* published an increasing number of articles on current political matters. For instance, in a special issue of the magazine to coincide with the third anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, Zygmunt Balicki, secretary-general of the *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques* (FIAPP), declared that former concentration camp prisoners were against "the policy of the imperialist powers in the western occupation zones of Germany; a policy whose purpose is to rebuild German economic and military might as a bastion of aggression against democratic nations".[139] Balicki also held the British and Americans jointly responsible for Nazi crimes: "The victims of Nazism, which was brought into being by German corporations supported by foreign capital, will expose the plans of American corporations which, under the hypocritical guise of bringing aid to the countries of Europe, wish to destroy the economic and political independence of those countries, obliterate their democratic gains won at the cost of countless victims and a sea of blood, and establish fascist regimes run by the faithful lackeys of domestic and foreign capital."

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137 KC PPR to the PPR caucus in the ZG PZbWP, 12 Feb. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

138 Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 16 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 5.

139 Zygmunt Balicki, "Międzynarodowy dzień b. Więźniów", *Wolni Ludzie*, 11 Apr. 1948.

Aside from such propagandist articles, which appeared regularly throughout 1948, there were no profound changes in the character of the magazine or in the image of the past it promoted. Recollections of the camps published in *Wolni Ludzie* continued to be dominated by crimes and suffering. Although contributors would also write about survival strategies—from the "organisation" of food and barter to cultural and religious life and solidarity amongst prisoners—only sporadic reference was made to the organised resistance movement.

It was not until the first half of 1949 that a clear shift of emphasis occurred in the way *Wolni Ludzie* presented the reality of the camps. This was accompanied by yet another change in the post of editor-in-chief.[140] Sergiusz Jaśkiewicz was replaced by Teofil Witek after the former was arrested for improper conduct during his time in the camps.[141] At the PZbWP's national congress in July 1949, when reporting on the work of the magazine, Witek declared:

> [...] we do not wish to publish gruesome descriptions in *Wolni Ludzie*. We want to finish with victimhood and martyrdom. Our aim is to elicit the positive themes and moments from the history of the concentration camps, in other words, to focus on the struggle, on that which is good and uplifting, and not divisive.[142]

To prove that the magazine's editorial board was going in the right direction, Witek cited two recently published articles on the subject of Buchenwald, which, he argued, "highlight that struggle, that positive aspect, namely, that it is not just about the atrocities of the SS, but also about the resistance of the prisoners—about the inspirational acts of people destined for extermination." There was also one other change: while earlier articles on the resistance movement in the camps had spoken of the cooperation amongst supporters of various political parties and groupings, now the conspirators were all Communists or Communist sympathisers. In the second half of 1949, *Wolni Ludzie* ran a series of articles on the resistance movement in Buchenwald, in which Communists were presented as the leading force in the anti-fascist resistance movement.[143] It was no accident that the

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140 The editors-in-chief of *Wolni Ludzie* were, in order: Antoni Kobyłecki, Sergiusz Jaśkiewicz, Krystyna Żywulska and Teofil Witek (Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 25 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 5; Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 23 Feb. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 7; Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warszawa 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2; Interview with Krystyna T.).

141 Krystyna T. claims that the charges against Jaśkiewicz were fabricated and served only as a pretext for his arrest (Interview with Krystyna T.).

142 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

143 See, inter alia: "Front był tam, gdzie byli antyfaszyści. Akcja sabotażowa w Buchenwaldzie", *Wolni Ludzie*, 30 Jun.–15 Jul. 1949; "Front był tam, gdzie byli antyfaszyści. Walka ze zdradą w Buchenwaldzie", B. Szerląg (ed.) on the basis of reminiscences of H. Sokolak, *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-30 Jul. 1949; Mieczysław Kowalski, "Front był tam, gdzie

editors had chosen to focus on the history of precisely this concentration camp. In occupied Poland, Communists had accounted for only a small part of the resistance movement. The PPR's forces had been modest compared to those of the Polish Underground State (*Państwo Podziemne*) and Home Army (AK), which were loyal to the Government-in-Exile, or to those of other armed underground organisations such as the Peasant Battalions (BCH) and National Armed Forces (NSZ). Whereas in 1943 the AK could boast 250,000 soldiers, the PPR-controlled People's Guard (GL) had around 10,000.[144] Both organisations had a corresponding proportion of members in the concentration camps. This is a significant difference compared to France and other West European countries, where communists played a greater role in the anti-fascist resistance movement. In Germany, too, the proportion of communists among underground activists was much greater than in Poland. Many members of the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, KPD) ended up in Buchenwald. It was one of very few concentration camps where a fairly broad international resistance network, dominated by German Communists, had operated during the war.[145] As early as in the 1940s, the history of Buchenwald acquired—not without the contribution of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED)—a legendary status; the articles published in *Wolni Ludzie* simply repeated this legend for the benefit of Polish readers.[146]

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byli antyfaszyści, Polska Partia Robotnicza w Buchenwaldzie", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Aug. 1949.

144 Krystyna Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1943-1948*, Poznań 1990, p. 20; Andrzej Friszke, *Polska. Losy państwa i narodu*, Warszawa 2003, p. 68.

145 On the subject of the resistance movement in Buchenwald and the role played in it by German Communists, see, inter alia: *Der „gesäuberte" Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald*, Lutz Niethammer (ed.), Berlin 1994; Karin Hartewig, "Wolf unter Wölfen? Die prekäre Macht der kommunistischen Kapos im Konzentrationslager Buchenwald" in Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth and Christoph Dickmann (eds) *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, Vol. 2, Göttingen 1998; Volkhard Knigge, Rikola-Gunner Lüttgenau, Bodo Ritscher and Harry Stein, *Konzentrationslager Buchenwald 1937-1945. Speziallager Nr. 2 1945-1950. Zwei Lager an einem Ort—Geschichte und Erinnerungskonstruktion*, Weimar–Buchenwald 1998, pp. 47-52.

146 Paradoxically, at the moment of their publication, the Buchenwald Communists were blacklisted in East Germany. They had fallen victim to internecine struggles between the "Moscow group", centred around Walter Ulbricht, and those activists of the KPD who had spent the period of the Third Reich either in emigration in the West or in Nazi concentration camps. In the years 1949–1955 many of them were removed from important posts in the party and the administration, and some faced charges regarding their actions in Buchenwald.

The final issue of *Wolni Ludzie* came out in August 1949. In early September, following the merger between the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners (PZbWP) and the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD), *Wolni Ludzie* was replaced by a new magazine—*Za Wolność i Lud* [For Freedom and the People]. In this new publication there was no place for martyrdom; if the Nazi camps were mentioned at all, it was solely in the context of the resistance movement. An article by Mariusz Kwiatkowski about the Majdanek Museum reflected the fact that members of the resistance were now synonymous with Communists. The museum display, wrote Kwiatkowski, should present not only crimes and suffering but also the history of the resistance movement within the camp: "The Majdanek inmates did not only suffer and perish"; they also "fought as far as the terrible living conditions would allow. And they believed in tomorrow. Perhaps not in their own tomorrow, but in the future of the cause for which they perished. Not for nothing does the old clothing bear labels which read: 'political—particularly dangerous'. It was communists of all nationalities who wore that clothing."[147]

The politicisation of the association and its subordination to PPR/PZPR directives encountered stiff resistance amongst the ex-prisoner community. As one Szczecin Branch delegate to the PZbWP's National Congress in July 1949 noted, "the reactionary forces in our local branch initially closed ranks to such an extent" that members who had "worked selflessly and who understood the directives of our leaders" were not allowed to speak.[148] Although, the delegate continued, the purges carried out amongst the Szczecin Branch's leadership as a result of intervention by the association's Executive Board had significantly weakened these reactionary forces, there were still local branches where ideological enemies held positions of power. A delegate from Lublin also questioned the efficacy of the personnel changes in the association's leadership. He complained about the insufficient political engagement of PZbWP activists, "who are involved only with our association and are in many cases completely detached from public life". "As soon as we would do some political or public work, these pseudo-colleagues would turn away from us and look on from the sidelines." Likewise, a delegate from the Pomorski (Pomeranian) Branch admitted that although the association had been quite active in the years 1947-1948, this activity had been completely devoid of "ideological aspects". "The only topic of our meetings was the deeply entrenched victimhood of our members, their desire for privileges, their constant demands for disability pensions, rail discounts, etc. All this self-pity was reducing the association to the level of a mutual admiration society for martyrs. Most members of the Executive Board did not

147 Mariusz Kwiatkowski, "Majdanek 1941-1944", *Za Wolność i Lud*, 1-15 Apr. 1950.

148 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

understand, or did not want to understand, that charity work is not the sole aim of our association", and that "[its] main tasks […] are to mobilise the rank and file for the purpose of rebuilding our devastated country, to raise the political consciousness of our members, to adopt a tough and unyielding stance against the machinations of the imperialist camp, and to cooperate as much as possible with the Party, which is realising the long-held desire of Polish working people for social justice". Overall, in the opinion of one member of the PZbWP's Executive Board, despite initial resistance from the ex-prisoner community the "struggle against victimhood" had proved to be a success, and former prisoners, "instead of isolating themselves from the rest of society" and "reliving for the thousandth time their experiences from the prisons and camps", were becoming increasingly involved "in political and public life…".[149] Also, the changing character of remembrance ceremonies was noted with satisfaction. According to a delegate of the Pomorski Branch, "whereas in 1946-47 one could detect a note of self-pity in the commemorations, in 1948 the prevailing mood at all such events is one of cooperation with the Soviet Union and with the People's Democracies in our struggle for peace and for a better future free of human exploitation".

It would seem, however, that the "struggle against victimhood" campaign pursued by the association's leadership enjoyed genuine support amongst a section of the ex-prisoner community. Members of the association feared that if their own suffering was over-emphasised, it could lead to public disapproval and cause the organisation to lose importance. In private discussions the complaint was often made that former prisoners were not treated on the same terms as veterans. Stanisław Jagielski, a former inmate of Płaszów and Auschwitz-Birkenau, was one of those to express concern about the image of the association's members. In response to an accusation made by one of his former camp comrades that in his memoir published in 1946[150] he had overlooked many crimes and presented an embellished picture of camp life, Jagielski explained that in writing about his experiences he had not intended to give a full account of the reality of the concentration camps. His purpose had been, above all, to describe those things which had enabled himself and his comrades to survive. Had they not escaped into a land of dreams, turned a blind eye to the cruelty around them, and tried to create an internal world and remain cheerful, they would not have managed to survive. "And you, my friends," appealed Jagielski, "you too should abandon this terrible ballast. There is nothing to savour. It is time you stopped being tiresome passengers with hideous baggage. We shall always understand each other, so why introduce others to our world? It only provokes anxiety and disgust."[151]

149 Ibid.

150 Stanisław Jagielski, *Sclavus Saltatus. Wspomnienia lekarza,* Warszawa 1946.

151 Stanisław Jagielski, "Odpowiedź—list do Albina Mazurkiewicza", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Sep. 1947.

Conducted from the end of 1947, the "struggle against victimhood" campaign was not limited to the ex-prisoner community; it encompassed society at large. In his book on the image of Germans and of the Nazi occupation in the second half of the 1940s in Poland, Edmund Dmitrów argues that people's wartime experiences were increasingly ignored.[152] The Polish press stressed the need to overcome wartime trauma and look to the future. According to Dmitrów, these changes were driven by the Communist authorities, who sought to counter the martyrological view of the occupation with their own "heroic-progressive" interpretation. "In official circles, the administrators of culture believed that post-war literature was too focused on crimes and martyrdom, that 'heinous acts were talked about too widely and too often'. They felt that when it came to the image of the Nazi occupation, it would be better to highlight the themes of active struggle and guerrilla warfare, and generally to direct people's interest towards contemporary problems."[153] However, as Dmitrów points out, the "struggle against victimhood" campaign was to some extent in tune with the prevailing social and intellectual mood. Similar views were also expressed by certain columnists who were not at all connected with the regime.

One of the first columnists to tackle this problem at the literary level was Stanisław Kisielewski. In an article for the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* published in mid-May 1945, thus barely two weeks after the end of the war, Kisielewski expressed his regret that Polish literature was dominated by the theme of occupation.[154] Readers, he claimed, were weary of the terrible experiences of recent years; they needed to detach themselves from painful memories and restore a sense of moral equilibrium. Kisielewski believed that war literature was hampered by a lack of distance from the events it described and that the realistic memoirs and fiction being published in vast quantities were largely devoid of artistic merit. One cannot, argued Kisielewski, flood readers with "Auschwitz-Majdanek" literature and war stories. The task of the writer should be to "liberate society from its wartime horrors, and not to ram them down its throat". Although the article was well received by some colleagues at *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kisielewski's view was an isolated one. In the following years, however, the Polish press published an increasing number of texts that were critical of the excessive naturalism and gruesomeness of Polish war literature. According to Dmitrów, "this reflected the evolution in the immediate post-war years of readers' attitudes towards the way in which the subject of the occupation was usually

152 Edmund Dmitrów, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków. Poglądy i opinie z lat 1945-1948*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 155-162.

153 Ibid., pp. 158-159.

154 Stefan Kisielewski, "Tematy wojenne", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 20 May 1945.

presented in Polish literature".[155] However, while writers such as Stefan Kisielewski, Stanisław Lem and Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa advocated a more profound coming to terms with the experience of occupation rather than its neglect, the Communist authorities wanted to end all debate on the subject of the past.[156]

In the first days of September 1949, the Founding Congress of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD) took place in Warsaw. The newly-formed organisation comprised a dozen or so prisoners' and veterans' associations, including the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners.[157] The creation of ZBoWiD entailed the centralisation of all existing prisoners' and veterans' organisations and their total subordination to the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). At the symbolic level, this meant that concentration camp prisoners were equated, once and for all, with fighters in the anti-fascist resistance movement. A text published on the eve of Founding Congress by Bernard Fuksiewicz, deputy chairman of the PZbWP's Executive Board, illustrates this perfectly. Fuksiewicz explained that both the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners on the one hand, and the Union of Fighters against Fascism and the Nazi Invasion for Freedom and Democracy (which later merged with ZBoWiD) on the other, had a common origin, namely, "the struggle against fascism and the Nazi invasion". If, despite this, two separate organisations had been established in the immediate post-war years, this was only due to the "different course of events related to their struggle, during which some combatants were arrested by the Nazi police apparatus and ended up in prisons or concentration camps, while others continued to fight as free men and women".[158] After the war, both groups were "directly influenced by their most recent experiences: former political prisoners—by the cruelty, suffering, and resistance under difficult conditions in the concentration camps; former participants of the armed struggle—by their combat experience in partisan or military units". Initially, therefore, the creation of two separate associations had been justified. Now, however, argued Fuksiewicz, in light of the recent changes that had occurred in Poland and around the world, the time had come to unite.

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A common view held by researchers investigating Polish memory of the Second World War is that the roots of the martyrological-heroic interpretation of the war

155 Dmitrów, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków*, pp. 157-158.

156 Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa, "Temat czy pisarz?", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 24 Jun. 1945; Stanisław Lem, "Jeszcze 'Ostatni etap'", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 16 May 1948.

157 Bernard Fuksiewicz, "Przed zjednoczeniem bratnich związków", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Aug. 1949; August Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce w latach 1944-1949*, Warszawa 2002, p. 168.

158 Fuksiewicz, "Przed zjednoczeniem bratnich związków", *Wolni Ludzie*, 31 Aug. 1949.

and occupation, so dominant in the post-war years, should be sought in the traditions of Polish Romanticism.[159] Thus, for instance, Jonathan Huener, the author of a monograph on the Auschwitz Museum, writes:

> The term "martyrdom", a constituent element of Poland's post-war commemorative vocabulary, is a useful indicator of Polish considerations of Auschwitz and the place of the camp in the county's culture. "Martyrs", "martyrdom", and "martyrology" were consistently used to describe Auschwitz victims, their fate, and their memory.[160]

Although Huener admits that in the immediate post-war years the victims of Nazi oppression were perceived as martyrs in many European countries, in Poland, he argues, this interpretation had specifically Catholic and national overtones:

> For Poles, however, the specifically Polish and Christian overtones in these terms—natural to their traditional Roman Catholic discourse—were obvious, and lent the Auschwitz inmate a quality of virtue and sacrifice for a higher good, such as patriotism or socialism. Polish prisoners or "martyrs" at Auschwitz were not simply suffering, but suffering and dying because of their Catholic faith, their political convictions, or their love of the fatherland.

This did not necessarily imply the exclusion of other nationalities from the community of victims, but it nevertheless negated the diversity of experience of the various persecuted groups: "In any case, to designate all Polish and non-Polish victims as "martyrs" was to keep Auschwitz in a conventional trope of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism and to undermine the historical uniqueness of the camp and the diversity of experience there."

To be sure, the 19th-century messianic tradition played a significant role in shaping society's image of the war and occupation. As mentioned earlier, this martyrological-heroic narrative appeared in Poland shortly after, or even during, the Second World War; it was not, however, the dominant narrative at the time. In the 1940s, there was no consensus in Poland on how to interpret the experience of the concentration camps; it was rather a source of permanent conflict and controversy. The experience of helplessness so common among former camp inmates proved especially difficult to reconcile with the idea that only defenders of the Fatherland and defenders of ideas were considered worthy of respect.[161]

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159 Cf., inter alia: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge, Mass 1981, pp. 89-90; Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz*, *Poland and the Politics of Commemoration 1945-1979*, Ohio 2004, pp. XVii, 48-49; Isabelle Engelhardt, *A Topography of Memory. Representations of the Holocaust at Dachau and Buchenwald in Comparison with Auschwitz*, Yad Vashem–Washington DC–Brussels 2002, p. 162.

160 Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration*, p. 48.

161 On the subject of this "military hierarchy of values", see: Klaus Bachmann, *Długi cień Trzeciej Rzeszy. Jak Niemcy zmienili swój charakter narodowy*, Wrocław 2005, p. 120ff.

How Polish memory of the Second World War would have evolved had the Communists not come to power remains an open question. There is no doubt, however, that the political history of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), and then of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), had a decisive impact on the nature of this memory during the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). The tendency to highlight struggle and heroism—particularly that of Communist activists—and simultaneously to denigrate and marginalise civilian war victims, was a phenomenon that could be observed in the Soviet Union and in other countries of the Eastern bloc, too. In the USSR, a cult of war heroes took hold, encompassing Red Army soldiers and Communist partisans, while victims of Nazism, forced labourers, Soviet prisoners of war, and other concentration camp inmates were often persecuted as traitors and defeatists.[162] The myth of the "Great Patriotic War", according to which all the peoples of the Soviet Union fought in unison against the fascist invader until final victory, served to legitimise and consolidate the Stalinist regime. There was no place in this myth for the suffering of civilians and soldiers, for internal national or political conflicts, for collaboration with the Nazis or, finally, for errors in the art of war which cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

The glorification of concentration camp victims in socialist countries in the immediate post-war years is well illustrated by the example of the GDR; it culminated in the Buchenwald Memorial (*Buchenwald Mahnmal*), unveiled in 1958. The monument gave artistic expression to the legend, promoted by the SED leadership, of the communist resistance movement in Buchenwald. Designed as a secular Via Dolorosa and crowned with a Freedom Tower (*Freiheitsturm*), it was a symbol of the ulti-

162 On the subject of memory of the Second World War in the countries of the former Soviet Union, see, inter alia: Natali'ja Konradova and Anna Ryleva, "Helden und Opfer. Denkmäler in Russland und Deutschland" in *Osteuropa* 4-6 (2005); Jutta Scherrer, "Sowjetunion/Russland. Siegesmythos versus Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung" in Monika Flake (ed.) *Mythen der Nationen. 1945—Arena der Erinnerung*, Begleitbände zur Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 2. Okt. 04–27. Feb. 05, Berlin 2004; Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in Russia*, London 2000; idem, "War, Death, and Remembrance in Soviet Russia" in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*; Frank Kämpfer, "Vom Massengrab zum Heroenhügel. Akkulturationsfunktionen sowjetischer Kriegsdenkmäler" in Reinhardt Koselleck and Michael Jeismann (eds) *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegsdenkmäler in der Moderne*, München 1994; Jutta Scherrer, "Ukraine. Konkurrierende Erinnerungen", ibid.; Bernhard Chiari and Robert Maier, "Volkskrieg und Heldenstädte: Zum Mythos des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges in Weißrußland" in ibid. The same publication also contains articles on Lithuania (Michael Kohrs), Latvia (Eva-Clarita Onken) and other Eastern bloc countries, including Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic (Wilma Iggers), Slovakia (Tatjana Tönsmeyer), Hungary (Eva Kovács, Gerhard Seewann), Bulgaria (Tzvetan Tzvetanov) and Romania (Lucian Boia).

mate victory of socialism over fascism. The Buchenwald inmates were portrayed as fighters of the anti-fascist communist resistance movement, while other categories of victim were ignored.[163] Raising members of the communist resistance movement to the rank of heroes served to legitimise the German rump state governed by the SED, and the GDR was to be the successor of this tradition. It is no accident that the Buchenwald myth was revitalised when the GDR experienced a major crisis of legitimacy precipitated by the uprising of 17 June 1953.

At the same time, however, in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, and then in the GDR, successive groups were systematically excluded from the community of victims and heroes; in February 1947, the Society of People Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes*, VVN) was established in Germany.[164] Initially, the VVN accepted political prisoners—German communists, social democrats, and members of other parties—as well as Jews, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, and representatives of other groups of victims. As in the case of the PZbWP, over subsequent years, under pressure from the SED and the Soviet Military Administration, it evolved inexorably from a society of victims into an association of resistance movement fighters. The society was accused of concentrating too much on welfare activities and not enough on political issues. Changes took place not only at the level of rhetoric. Purges within the VVN leadership saw the organisation become completely subordinated to the SED. At the same time, certain groups of victims were excluded. Jehovah's Witnesses, who were banned in the GDR, were thrown out of the organisation in 1950. The anti-Semitic campaign pursued in the GDR in 1949-1952 led to the emigration of many Jews who had belonged to the VVN; others were expelled from the society as "Zionist agents". Numerous members of the non-communist resistance movement, including participants of the July Bomb Plot against Hitler, were removed from the organisation. The VVN was finally disbanded in 1953, its place taken by

163 On the subject of the iconography of the Buchenwald Memorial, see: Volkhard Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg. Vom Konzentrationslager Buchenwald zur Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte der DDR" in Volkhard Knigge, Jürgen Maria Pietsch and Thomas A. Seidel, *Versteinertes Gedenken. Das Buchenwald Mahnmal von 1958*, edited on request of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation and the Board of Trustees of the Schloß Ettersberg Foundation, 1997.

164 On the subject of the history of the VVN and the evolution of its stance in respect of victims of Nazism in the GDR, see: Elke Reuter, Detlef Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953. Die Geschichte der Verfolgten des Naziregimes in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR*, Berlin 1997; Olaf Groehler, "Verfolgten- und Opfergruppen im Spannungsfeld der politischen Auseinandersetzungen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik" in Jürgen Danyel (ed.) *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin 1995.

an elite body known as the Committee of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters (*Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer*, KdAW), which was composed solely of 32 trusted party comrades.

As Pieter Lagrou describes in his book on the legacy of the German occupation in West European countries, even there the heroic interpretation of the wartime experience was dominant until the 1960s. Although, as Lagrou stresses, the occupation was much less onerous than in Central and Eastern Europe, West European societies were nonetheless traumatised and needed a patriotic narrative that would allow them to restore a sense of national dignity. For this reason, in France, the Netherlands, and Belgium alike, there was a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the resistance movement and to accord it a decisive role in the victory over Third Reich. This was particularly noticeable in France, where a battle over memory was fought between the Gaullists and the Communists. Whereas Gaullist "historical policy" was exceptionally elitist—veneration being restricted to a few military heroes, soldiers of the Free French (*Forces Françaises Libres*) and selected members of the *Résistance*, with the total exclusion of the left—the Communist interpretation of the wartime experience was far more inclusive. This also pertained to memory of the concentration camps: French Communists regarded not only political prisoners and members of the resistance movement, but also other victims of Nazi persecution, including Jews, as martyrs and heroes in the struggle against fascism. Such inclusivity was reflected in the admission rules to French victims' and veterans' associations, which were dominated by the left: "The inclusion assimilated all victims with national martyrs. All were patriots and as such participated in the spirit if not the battles of the resistance."[165] Although this extension of the notions of patriot and veteran to civilian war victims provoked criticism from the "defenders of traditional patriotism", who opposed the identification of "true" combatants with the new type of anti-fascist martyr, the Communist-dominated victims' associations managed to acquire considerable standing in French society.[166]

In Palestine, too, and then in Israel until the 1960s, people spoke unwillingly about the Holocaust, and if they did it was to recall heroic episodes such as the revolts in Treblinka and Sobibór, the uprisings in the Warsaw and Białystok ghettos, and the participation of Jewish soldiers in battles on the side of the Allies.[167] This

165 Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, p. 228.

166 Ibid., p. 241.

167 The paragraph below is based primarily on Tom Segev's excellent book, *The Seventh Million. The Israelis and the Holocaust*, NY 1994. In addition to that, on the subject of the changing memory of the Holocaust in Palestine and Israel, see also: Natan Sznaider, "Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg. Berichte zur Geschichte der Erinnerung—Israel" in Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei (eds) *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinander-*

manner of presenting history concealed a need to set an example to young Israelis, who—it was believed—unlike Jews from the diaspora, had to learn to fight for their rights. Participation in the struggle against Nazism was also to be a bargaining chip in the creation of a Jewish state. Holocaust survivors were thus admitted to Palestine, and then to Israel, without any great enthusiasm. Immigrants from Europe were scorned, since it was believed that they had not resisted the Germans and had gone passively to their deaths. There was also a widespread view that only immoral, corrupt, and egotistical individuals could have survived the war. Palestinian Jews felt overwhelmed by the responsibility of caring for Holocaust survivors with all their psychological and physiological problems. In the nascent state, at war with its neighbours, there was no place for sympathy and grief. As Amos Oz described it in his autobiographical work, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, the *Yishuv* treated European Holocaust survivors "with compassion and a certain revulsion: miserable wretches, was it our fault that they chose to sit and wait for Hitler instead of coming here while there was still time? Why did they allow themselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter instead of organising and fighting back? And if only they'd stop nattering on in Yiddish, and stop telling us about all the things that were done to them over there, because all that didn't reflect too well on them or on us for that matter."[168]

Since in different countries, with different histories and political systems, one can observe in the first decades after the war similar attempts to glorify the memory of war and occupation, either by expelling certain groups of victims from society or excluding them from public discourse (as in the USSR, the GDR, and Israel)[169], or by hailing them *en bloc* as national heroes (as in France), the question arises whether the tendency to perceive one's own role in history as that of a hero and not a victim is a common cultural trait of all European societies in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.[170] Indeed, as the example of Poland shows, the process of glorifying victims often took place against the wishes of those concerned.

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setzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord, München 2002; Moshe Zuckermann, "Israel. Die Darstellung des Holocaust in Israels Gedenkkultur", in *Mythen der Nationen*; Saul Friedländer, "Memory of the Shoah in Israel. Symbols, Rituals, and Ideological Polarization" in James E. Young (ed.) *The Art of Memory. Holocaust Memorials in History*, Munich–New York 1994.

168 Amos Oz, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, London 2005, p. 13.

169 Only 20 per cent of former Soviet prisoners of war and forced labourers returned home directly after the war. The majority were interned in NKVD camps or deported deep into the USSR (Scherrer, *Sowjetunion/Russland,* pp. 627-628).

170 Michael Jeismann and Rolf Westheider, "Wofür stirbt der Bürger? Nationaler Totenkult und Staatsbürgertum in Deutschland und Frankreich seit der Französischen Revolution" in *Der politische Totenkult*; Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses" in *Verbrechen erinnern*.

Regardless of differences in political systems, glorification always served to integrate society and to legitimise authority (France under de Gaulle, the Polish People's Republic) or a state's very existence (Israel, the GDR). Naturally, in authoritarian or totalitarian states the official interpretation of history enjoyed a significantly stronger position than in democratic countries, where it was continually modified and questioned by competing memory groups.

Chapter 2
Our "Jewish Comrades"? Who Belongs to the Community of Victims?

"Despite the wartime experience, anti-Semitism is still present in Poland", wrote Jerzy Andrzejewski in an article published in *Odrodzenie* in the first half of July 1946.

> Polish anti-Semitism did not perish in the ruins and charred remains of the ghettos. The murder of a few million Jews has proved insufficiently horrific to erase Polish mental and emotional habits. The Nazi school of hatred and contempt is not seen as a sufficiently urgent warning. It is hard to speak about these things, but that is the truth of the matter.[1]

Although debate is ongoing about the causes and extent of anti-Semitism, most researchers agree that the Second World War, far from discrediting anti-Semitism in Poland, actually made it more widespread, or in any case more brutal.[2]

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1 Jerzy Andrzejewski, "Zagadnienie polskiego antysemityzmu", *Odrodzenie*, 7 and 14 Jul. 1946. For more extensive information on the debate amongst Polish intellectuals in the second half of the 1940s on the subject of post-war anti-Semitism, see: Dariusz Libionka, "Antysemityzm i zagłada na łamach prasy w Polsce w latach 1945-1946" in Michał Głowiński et al. (eds) *Polska 1944/45-1989. Studia i materiały*, Vol. 2, Warszawa 1996; Klaus-Peter Friedrich, *Der nationalsozialistische Judenmord in polnischen Augen. Einstellungen in der polnischen Presse 1942-1946/47* (PhD), University of Cologne 2002, published online: http://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/952/ (10 Mar. 2013), pp. 467-475ff; Joanna Michlic-Coren, "The Holocaust and its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals 1945-1947" in David Bankier (ed.) *The Jews are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after WW II*, New York 2004.

2 On the subject of anti-Semitism and violence against Jews in Poland in the second half of the 1940s, see, inter alia: David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946", *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998); Joanna Michlic-Coren, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland 1918-1939 and 1945-1947", *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 13 (2000); Bożena Szaynok, "Polacy i Żydzi lipiec 1944-lipiec 1946" in Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Żaryn (eds) *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, Warszawa 2006; idem, "Problem antysemityzmu w relacjach polsko-żydowskich w latach 1945-1953" in Barbara Engelking-Boni, Jacek Leociak and Anna Zięębińska-Witek (eds) *Zagłada Żydów. Pamięć narodowa a pisanie historii w Polsce i we Francji*, Lublin 2006; Jan T. Gross, *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, New York 2006.

Despite the clear resentment and hostility towards Jews, it was precisely during the initial post-war period that Holocaust memory was more present in Polish society than at any other time, perhaps with the exception of the last two decades. The subject was discussed in the media, in academic studies, as well as in memoirs and fiction. Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak estimates that one quarter of all Polish publications on the Holocaust (not including belles lettres) appeared in the years 1945-1949[3], the majority being published by the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH), the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), and other Jewish organisations. However, other publishers were involved, too. One should mention, above all, the Bulletin of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Nazi Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP), which in the years 1946-1951 published a series of studies on the death camps and concentration camps and, more broadly, on the fate of Polish Jewry.[4] Also of relevance here are the numerous novels and short stories written by such Polish–Jewish authors as Kazimierz Brandys, Adolf Rudnicki, and Stanisław Wygodzki, and the many texts written from first-hand experience, such as Tadeusz Borowski's Auschwitz stories, Jerzy Broszkiewicz's *Oczekiwanie* [Waiting], Zofia Nałkowska's *Medallions*, and Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Holy Week* .[5] How can one explain the presence of the Holocaust

3 Ewa Koźmińska-Frejkal, "Świadkowanie Zagłady—Holocaust jako zbiorowe doświadczenie Polaków", *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, Vol. 49, 2 (2000), p. 183.

4 See, inter alia: *Biuletyn GKBZNwP*, Vol. 1 (1946): Filip Friedman, "Zagłada Żydów polskich w latach 1939-1945"; "Obozy zagłady, obozy koncentracyjne i obozy pracy na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939-1945" compiled by Zofia Czyńska and Bogumił Kupiść; Jan Sehn, "Obóz zagłady Oświęcim"; "Obóz zagłady Chełmno" compiled by Władysław Bednarz; "Obóz zagłady Treblinka" compiled by Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz. *Biuletyn GKBZNwP*, Vol. 3 (1947): "Obóz Zagłady w Bełżcu" compiled by Eugeniusz Szrojt; "Obóz zagłady w Sobiborze" compiled by Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz. *Biuletyn GKBZNwP*, Vol. 4 (1948): "Obóz koncentracyjny i zagłady Majdanek" compiled by Zdzisław Łukaszkiewicz.

5 Belles lettres include works such as: Jerzy Andrzejewski, "Wielki tydzień" in *Noc i inne opowiadania*, Warszawa 1945 (English: idem, *Holy Week: A Novel of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, introduction and commentary by Oscar E. Swan, foreword by Jan Gross, Athens, Ohio 2007); Kazimierz Brandys, *Samson*, Warszawa 1948; Jerzy Broszkiewicz, *Oczekiwanie*, Warszawa 1948; Adolf Rudnicki, *Wielkanoc*, Warszawa 1947. Other titles that should be mentioned in this context include some of the novellas by Zofia Nałkowska from the volume *Medaliony*, Warszawa 1946 (English: idem, *Medallions*, translated and with an introduction by Diana Kuprel, Evanston, Illinois 2000), and some of the short stories by Tadeusz Borowski, including "The Death of Schillinger", "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen" and "The People Who Walked On" (idem, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, selected and translated by Barbara Vedder, London 1976). Mention should also be made at this point of one of the most chilling novels touching on the Holocaust, *Czarny potok* by Leopold Buczkowski, which was written as early as in

in Polish public discourse at a time when there was widespread indifference, resentment, and outright hostility towards Jews?

The decisive factor seems to be that, until the end of the 1940s, there continued to exist in Poland a fairly sizeable Jewish minority (of between 210,000 and 240,000 people, according to various estimates), which enjoyed significant autonomy and which was represented by various political parties and social and cultural organisations.[6] Through such institutions as the CKŻP, CŻKH, and the Jewish Religious Congregation, the Jewish community was able to lobby for its own interpretation of history.

Also significant as regards memory and commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against the Jews is the fact that in the immediate post-war years the PPR leadership, dominated by long-standing members of the pre-war Communist Party of Poland (KPP; 1918-1939), was still favourably inclined towards Poland's Jewish minority, even if its policies were somewhat ambivalent.[7] These policies were guided not just by ideology but also by pragmatism. The Communists wanted international recognition, yet after the experiences of the Nazi era, policy towards the Jewish population was for the Western allies an important criterion when evaluating the new regimes of Central and Eastern Europe.[8] The Polish authorities were also aware that the existence of relatively autonomous Jewish organisations was a condition of receiving foreign aid to help Holocaust survivors.

1946, but not published until 1954. A selection of Polish texts on the Holocaust is to be found in *Męczeństwo i zagłada Żydów w zapisach literatury polskiej*, compiled by Irena Maciejewska, Warszawa 1988. On the same subject, see also: ibid., editor's introduction, and Władysław Panas, "Szoah w literaturze polskiej" in Jerzy Święda (ed.) *Świadectwa i powroty nieludzkiego czasu. Materiały z konferencji naukowej poświęconej martyrologii lat II wojny światowej w literaturze*, Lublin 1990.

6 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 398-400; Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Surviors of the Holocaust in Poland. A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records 1944-1947*, New York–London 1994, p. 19. There are no reliable data on the size of the Jewish community in Poland after 1945, which is due partly to the fact that the only organisation registering these data was the CKŻP, to which not everyone reported. Many people also concealed their Jewish identity after the war. Secondly, owing to constant migratory traffic, the number of Jews in Poland was fluctuating all the time in the period 1944-1950/1951. The data cited above, referencing 210,000-240,000 people, date from the first half of 1946, when, after the repatriation from the USSR, but before the Kielce pogrom and the foundation of the State of Israel, the number of Jews in Poland was at its highest any time after the war.

7 On this subject see, inter alia: August Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce (1944-1949)*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 26-38; Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 405.

8 This aspect is noted in: Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 405, 473-474.

Perhaps another factor that influenced the attitude of the new authorities to the Jewish minority in Poland was that those same authorities included activists of Jewish origin. Although in most cases these activists maintained no contact with Jewish culture or religion, they could—for reasons of shared experience, if nothing else—be more sensitive to the problem of anti-Semitism and to issues surrounding Holocaust remembrance. The fact is that in the years 1944-1948/1949, the Polish state administration was still relatively open to initiatives concerning the commemoration and documentation of Jewish martyrdom.

Last but not least, when discussing Holocaust memory in Poland in the second half of the 1940s, it is important to note that the experience of war and occupation was a recent memory for those concerned. Although it had been the Nazis' strategy to isolate the Jewish population in ghettos and camps, Polish society nonetheless witnessed the persecution of Jews and was aware of its genocidal nature. Moreover, Poles were not only passive observers of the Holocaust: they often derived material benefit from it[9]—by taking over victims' possessions, homes, and businesses—and sometimes participated in the crimes themselves.[10] To drive out these facts from the individual and collective consciousness was difficult and required time, although there were certainly many who wished to forget about them as quickly as possible.

From the outset, interpretation and commemoration of the Holocaust gave rise to many conflicts in Poland. For sure, anti-Semitism and victim rivalry should be listed among the reasons for these conflicts. Equally important, however, was the sense of isolation and alienation which caused Jews to be excluded from the

9 For the benefits garnered by Poles from the Holocaust, see also: Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest. Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, New York 2012. Another text worth mentioning here is: Kazimierz Wyka, "Gospodarka wyłączona" in *Życie na niby*, 2nd ed., Warszawa 1959.

10 Over the past two decades or so, a number of works have been published that analyse attitudes in Polish society towards the extermination of the Jews. These have shown that the involvement of Poles in the Holocaust was greater than had previously been thought. A major breakthrough in this debate came with the publication of the book: Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka*, Sejny 2000 (Eng. edition: idem, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton University Press 2001). Many other important works have come out since then, however. See, inter alia: *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia*, Vol. I, edited by Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak, Warszawa 2002; *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939-1945. Studia i materiały*, edited by Andrzej Żbikowski, Warszawa 2006; Barbara Engelking, *„Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień…" Losy Żydów szukających pomocy na wsi polskiej 1942-1945*, Warszawa 2011; Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagt. Polowanie na Zydów 1942-1945. Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu*, Warszawa 2011; *Zarys krajobrazu. Wieś polska wobec zagłady Żydów 1942-1945*, Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski (eds), Warszawa 2011.

community of victims. It was not denial of the Holocaust so much as indifference to the fate of those whom society did not treat as "its own" that characterised the memory of the concentration camps and death in the years 1944-1948/1949. However, it was not until the end of this period that the subject became completely marginalised. This coincided with the emigration of most of the survivors, the Stalinisation of public life, and the wave of anti-Semitism that swept through Eastern bloc countries, including Poland, at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s.[11] One might even say that through their deliberate actions aimed at eliminating the Holocaust from public discourse, the Polish authorities attempted to turn the subject into a taboo.

Anti-Semitism

> A group of twenty Jews, who had escaped the death camp in Auschwitz, returned to Rejowiec, their home town. A few days later, these Jews received written threats demanding that they leave the town immediately. Not wishing to see the threats realised, the Jews left Rejowiec and are currently living in Chełmno at the seat of the [Central] Committee [of Jews in Poland].[12]

The above quotation is taken from a report drafted in early May 1945 by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) on the basis of information sent in from Chełmno. Both the records of the CKŻP and personal accounts reveal many similar cases of Jews who had survived the Nazi camps being greeted with hostility and intimidation by their former neighbours. These were not idle threats: many of those who returned were robbed and murdered.

When writing about Holocaust memory in Poland, it is hard to ignore the context of hostility and violence towards Jews, which was particularly intense in the immediate post-war years. Aside from the pogroms and anti-Jewish disturbances which took place in Kraków (11 August 1945), Parczew (5 February 1946), Kielce (4 July 1946), and in other places, attacks on individuals were also

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11 On this subject see: Arno Lustiger, *Czerwona księga. Stalin i Żydzi*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 261-361; Bożena Szaynok, "Walka z syjonizmem w Polsce (1948-1953)" in Tomasz Szarota (ed.) *Komunizm—ideologia, system, ludzie*, Warszawa 2001; idem, *Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska a Izrael 1944-1968*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 150-262; Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 198-201.

12 Report drawn up at the CKŻP on the basis of data from the Chełm branch, Apr./May 1945. Quoted after: *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944-1968. Teksty źródłowe*, compiled by Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, Warsaw 1997, p. 27.

common.[13] David Engel has managed to document 327 murders of Polish Jews between September 1944 and September 1946.[14] Anti-Jewish riots occurred in at least 102 places across Poland, particularly in the eastern part of the country.[15] Although these attacks were sometimes political in nature or amounted to plain robbery, it seems that in most cases Jews were deliberately targeted. Engel describes, for instance, how in mid-October 1944 four Jews—one man and three women—were stopped on their way to the town of Kraśnik. They were pulled out of the two carts they were travelling in, while their Christian fellow passengers were allowed to continue their journey without any problem.[16] Similar incidents occurred at railway stations and on trains.[17]

The sources and extent of post-war Polish anti-Semitism remain a subject of research and debate. Attempts to explain the phenomenon encounter numerous difficulties. Some historians claim that the increasing hostility towards Jews was caused by the actual or alleged support lent by the Jewish community to the Communist regime and by the strong over-representation of Jews and Poles of Jewish origin in the structures of power. Thus, according to Krystyna Kersten, "the fact that the victim was a Jew, or was perceived as a Jew, was one of the causes of hostility, but usually not the only cause" and "post-war anti-Semitism was directed

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13 On the subject of the pogrom in Kraków, see: Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 sierpnia 1945*, Warszawa 2000. On the subject of the events in Kielce, see: Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946*, Warszawa 1992. Cf. also: Krystyna Kersten, "Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach—znaki zapytania" in idem, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm—anatomia półprawd 1939-68*, Warszawa 1992; *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, edited by Łukasz Kamiński and Jan Żaryn, Warszawa 2006; Gross, *Fear*, pp. 81-166. Collections of documents on the Kielce pogrom: *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku. Dokumenty i materiały*, edited by Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, Kielce 1992.

14 Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland", pp. 49-50. Many historians believe this figure to be a considerable underestimate. According to various estimates, over the years 1944-1947, between 1,000 and 2,000 Polish Jews fell victim to murder. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 401; Michlic-Coren, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland*, p. 39; Gross, *Fear*, p. 35. Indeed, Engel himself admits that the documentation he has gathered is incomplete.

15 Natalia Aleksiun, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944-1950)*, Warszawa 2002, p. 88.

16 Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland", p. 74.

17 David Engel states that in June and July 1946 alone, at least eleven such incidents took place ("Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland", p. 74). Such "train campaigns" directed against Jews returning from the Soviet Union and carried out by units of the National Armed Forces (NSZ), and attacks on Jewish passengers travelling from Kielce to other towns and cities in Poland on the day of the Kielce pogrom, are also discussed by: Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 402; Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach*, pp. 58-60 and Gross, *Fear*, pp. 109-117.

not so much against Jews as against Communists who were regarded as Jews".[18] David Engel, however, argues that there is no geographical or temporal correlation between the intensification of violence against Jews and the murders of party officials or representatives of the apparatus of repression.[19] He also shows that the violence was in most cases deliberately directed against Jews and that it concerned people, including children, whom it would have been difficult to accuse of collaboration with the Communists.

Calculating the proportion of Jews and persons of Jewish origin in the post-war state apparatus may give rise to justified reservations. As August Grabski notes, aside from members of the PPR faction within the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, most Communists of Jewish origin did not identify with the culture and religion of their ancestors, nor did they act on behalf of the Jewish community in any particular way.[20] Even if one accepts the data submitted to Bolesław Bierut in 1945 by the Minister of State Security, Stanisław Radkiewicz, which showed that 1.7 per cent of posts in the Ministry of State Security (and 13 per cent of the top posts) were occupied by Jews, one must conclude that despite the clear over-representation of Jews relative to their numbers in Polish society in general, they nevertheless remained in the minority.[21] Equally, Jewish officers employed by the Security Service (UB) constituted only a tiny proportion of the total number of Polish Jews. The

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18 Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, pp. 192, 195.

19 In the conclusion, Engel writes: "Comparing the most identifiable and quantifiable features of attacks upon Jews and Polish government supporters appears to suggest, then, that each set of aggressive acts displayed its own characteristic fingerprints, as it were, and that the two fingerprints deviated from one another far more than they coincided. Jews were more at risk of being killed at different times and in different places than were government supporters, and Jewish women and children were in considerably greater danger than were Poles of the same sex and age." ("Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland", p. 70).

20 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce*, pp. 31-35. Others who draw attention to this are: Stanisław Krajewski, "Żydowscy komuniści—problem dla Żydów?" in idem, *Żydzi, judaizm, Polska*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 207-208; Jan T. Gross, "Cena strachu" in idem *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939-1948*, Kraków 1998, pp. 93-94. Cf. also: Andrzej Paczkowski, "Żydzi w UB. Próba weryfikacji stereotypu" in Szarota (ed.) *Komunizm—ideologia, system, ludzie*, p. 199.

21 Cited after: Kersten, "Żydzi—władza komunistów" in idem, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm*, pp. 83-84. Andrzej Paczkowski claims that the data in the official note drawn up by Bierut from his conversation with Radkiewicz were applicable to executive positions both at the central office and in the field. Paczkowski states that according to other sources the proportion of officers of Jewish origin at the headquarters of the ministry was around 30 per cent, while 63.5 per cent were Poles (Paczkowski, "Żydzi w UB. Próba weryfikacji stereotypu", pp. 196-198). Cf. also: Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, pp. 187-188.

situation was similar within the PPR/PZPR, which had 235,000 members in December 1945, over 550,000 at the beginning of 1947, and 1.5 million in 1949 following the PZPR's founding congress. Necessarily, Jews could only have accounted for a small proportion of the membership.[22] As August Grabski writes, "the overrepresentation of persons of Jewish origin in the apparatus of repression or in the central apparatus of the People's Republic does not alter the fact that, as far as the Polish authorities in general are concerned, the majority of posts were occupied by 'indigenous' Poles".[23] Thus, even in cases where perpetrators justified their hostility towards Jews by pointing to their ostensible collaboration with the Communists, the origin of this hostility should rather be sought in the deeply-rooted Polish stereotype of "Judeo-Communism" (*żydokomuna*) than in any rational motives.[24]

Other scholars mention the persistence of pre-war anti-Semitic stereotypes, which, far from disappearing after the Holocaust, actually became more entrenched under the influence of Nazi propaganda.[25] Some researchers note that one of the key factors underlying the hatred and violence towards Jews in the immediate post-war years was economic conflict.[26] During the Nazi occupation, Poles often appropriated the homes and possessions left behind by their displaced or murdered Jewish neighbours. As the latest research shows, robbery was one of the prime motives for denouncing Jews and participating directly in their genocide.[27] After the war, many Poles feared that their Jewish "neighbours" who had survived the Holocaust might want to recover their property. The Manifesto of

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22 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce*, pp. 26, 33. See also: Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, p. 153. Adelson's breakdown indicates that the biggest Jewish party in Poland in 1947 was the centrist-Zionist Ichud (with 7,000-8,000 members), with the PPR faction affiliated to the CKŻP in second place (with 7,000 members). Taken together, the other Zionist parties, both right- and left-wing ones, had a total of 9,000-9,500 members, while some 1,500 people had applied for membership of the socialist Bund. In spite of the significant support for left-wing parties, including the Communists, it is thus clear that the political sympathies of the Polish Jews were strongly divided (Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 434).

23 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce*, p. 34.

24 This view is also shared by Kersten, who writes that: "in the opinion of society, anyone who collaborated with the Communists might be a Jew", while "Poles of Jewish origin and the large group of people on the road leading from the culturally Jewish community to the Polish national community" were certainly considered Jews (*Narodziny systemu władzy*, p. 195).

25 See, inter alia: Michlic-Coren, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland".

26 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 400-401; Gross, *Fear*, pp. 39-47.

27 Engelking, *„Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień…"*, pp. 180-187; Alina Skibińska, "'Dostał 10 lat, ale za co?' Analiza motywacji sprawców zbrodni na Żydach na wsi kieleckiej w latach 1942-1944" in *Zarys krajobrazu...*, pp. 377-378. Mention should also be made here of another important, though in my opinion controversial book: Gross, Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest*.

the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) promised the restitution of property stolen during the Nazi occupation and granted equal rights to Jews in both "legal and actual" terms.[28] Soon after the Red Army had entered Lublin, Szlomo Herszenhorn, head of the PKWN's Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population established in early August 1944, reported on numerous conflicts surrounding the restitution of Jewish property.[29] It is worth recalling here that the impoverishment of Polish society and the brutalisation of human relationships as a result of the war and occupation undermined moral standards and respect for human life. This affected both the Polish population and—probably to an even greater degree—the Jewish population.[30]

What is important when evaluating the scale and consequences of post-war anti-Semitism is not just that anti-Jewish disturbances occurred, but that these were met with indifference and sometimes even approval from ordinary citizens, clergy and local state officials, from the army and Security Service, as well as from the Citizens' Militia, whose officers, moreover, often participated in the excesses themselves.[31] Anti-Semitic attitudes in post-war Poland also necessarily impacted on Holocaust (non-)memory and the conflicts over Holocaust remembrance.

Isolation

No less significant for the evolution of Holocaust memory in Poland was the physical and psychological isolation of the Jewish community, both during the war and after hostilities had ended. This isolation was clearly visible, for instance, during the campaign to assist people returning from Nazi labour camps and concentration camps, where it emerged even at the organisational level.

We have only approximate data regarding the number of Polish Jews who, having survived the Nazi camps, decided to return to Poland after the war; the figure is between 25,000 and 40,000 people.[32] Already in the winter and spring

28 Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, Journal of Laws 1944, no. 1, item 1 (annex).

29 "Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej przy Prezydium Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego", compiled by Michał Szulkin, *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1 (1971).

30 This is noted by: Marcin Zaremba, "Biedni Polacy na żniwach" in Daniel Lis (ed.) *Wokół „Złotych żniw". Debata o książce Jana Tomasza Grossa i Ireny Grudzińskiej-Gross*, Kraków 2011, pp. 161-173.

31 Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach*, Michlic-Coren, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland"; Gross, *Fear*, pp. 81-166.

32 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 388-390; Dobroszycki, *Surviors of the Holocaust in Poland*, pp. 11-13.

of 1945, Jewish committees were contacted by people who had survived Nazi concentration and labour camps liberated by the Red Army, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Hasag factory in Częstochowa, and the Łódź ghetto. As in the case of Polish prisoners, the return of Jews from camps located within the territory of post-war Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia did not commence until May 1945, with a few exceptions. Many Jews, having no home to which they could return, settled in the western regions of Poland, above all in Lower Silesia, and in this they were supported by the Polish authorities.

Jews liberated from the camps were in a terrible physical and mental state; the same was true of those who had survived in the forests, in bunkers, or in other hideouts. As Leon Kupferberg, chairman of the Interim Committee for Aid to the Jewish Population of Kraków, reported to the Provincial Governor of Kraków in March 1945, a large proportion of those returning from the camps were suffering from starvation diarrhoea; many others had tuberculosis.[33] Equally dramatic was a letter sent a few weeks later from the Jewish Committee (KŻ) in Częstochowa to the Ministry of Labour and Social Care (MPiOS).[34] Częstochowa, the author claimed, constituted one of the largest Jewish populations in Poland; it was a refuge for Jews liberated from the Hasag factory and also a stopover point for those returning from camps in Germany. This population, exhausted by persecution, hunger and disease, had no means of supporting itself, not even any clothing.

As the front advanced, Jewish committees sprang up in areas occupied by the Red Army.[35] At that time, according to Alina Skibińska, the role of the committees was "primarily to organise self-help".[36] The Jewish Committee established at the end of July 1944 in Lublin had an altogether different status. Although it, too, was a non-governmental institution, from the outset it received subsidies from the PKWN. The Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population, headed by Bund member Szlomo Herszenhorn, was established by Presidium of the PKWN almost in parallel, i.e. at the beginning of August 1944.[37] Both institutions cooperated closely. Their task was to organise help for survivors by supporting and coordinat-

33 Interim Committee for Aid to the Jewish Population of Kraków to the Provincial Governor of Kraków, 2 Mar. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 335.

34 Jewish Committee in Częstochowa to the MPiOS, 19 Mar. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 335.

35 The section below, on organisation of aid to Holocaust survivors, including concentration camp prisoners, is based largely on the following text: Alina Skibińska, "Powroty ocalonych" in Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak and Dariusz Libionka (eds) *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim 1939-1945*, Warszawa 2007. See also: Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 387-477; Aleksiun, *Dokąd dalej?*, pp. 49-72.

36 Skibińska, "Powroty ocalonych", p. 527.

37 Report I on the work of the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population for the period 8-31 Aug. 1944. Cited after: "Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej".

ing the activities of local Jewish committees. As the troops advanced westwards, the Jewish Committee and the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population set up their operation in successive regions of the country. They organised hostel accommodation, free food, and clothing rations. However, the resources available were far too inadequate to meet survivors' needs. As Herszenhorn stated in his report of September 1944, despite receiving a loan from the PKWN, the Jewish Committee in Lublin still lacked many basic items: fuel, mattresses, food, and clothing.[38] The hostel was overcrowded, without windows or heating, and people were sleeping on the floor. In other reports Herszenhorn complained that, despite the PKWN's recommendations, local authorities were not giving any support to the Jewish population, while in the provinces Jews were being forced to rely exclusively on the assistance provided by the Lublin committee, which, due to lack of funds, was very meagre.[39]

At the beginning of November 1944, the Lublin Jewish Committee was transformed into the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP).[40] In February 1945, the committee moved its headquarters from Lublin to Warsaw. The first head of the CKŻP was Emil Sommerstein from the centrist-Zionist Ichud party, a former deputy to the pre-war Polish parliament and member of the National Homeland Council (KRN).[41] The CKŻP comprised representatives of almost all the Jewish political parties and social organisations that operated legally in Poland.[42] The committee therefore saw itself as the legitimate voice of Poland's Jewish community in its dealings with authorities at home and abroad. Subordinate to the CKŻP was a network of local institutions with provincial and district committees. The CKŻP's local structures also included Jewish aid committees that had previously been

38 Report II on the work of the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population for the period 1-17 Sep. 1944. Cited after: "Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej".

39 Reports III-V on the work of the Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population for the period 18 Sep. - 25 Nov. 1944. Cited after: "Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu dla Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej".

40 Originally the committee was termed "provisional"; not until 1945 was it officially registered as the CKŻP. On the subject of the appointment of the CKŻP: David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: Central Committee of Polish Jews 1944-1946" in *East European Politics and Societies* 10, 1 (1996); Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", pp. 424-428.

41 The next chairmen of the CKŻP were Adolf Berman (1946-1949) and Hersz Smolar (1949-1950).

42 The CKŻP Presidium comprised representatives of the Jewish faction of the PPR, the Bund, Ichud, Poale Zion Left, Poale Zion Right, Hashomer Hatzair, the Jewish Fighting Organization, the Association of Veterans of the Armed Struggle against Fascism, and Hehalutz.

created at the grassroots level. With the establishment of the CKŻP, the existence of the PKWN's Office for Assistance to the Jewish Population was no longer deemed necessary; in December 1944, it was transformed into the Office for Jewish Affairs at the Nationalities Department of the Ministry of Public Administration. Thereafter, its role was limited to mediating between the state administration on the one hand, and the CKŻP and Jewish organisations on the other.

The committee's task was to rebuild Jewish social and cultural life in Poland; it established schools and cooperatives, registered survivors, and documented Nazi crimes. However, in the early years, the main function of the Jewish committees was to provide assistance to people coming out of hiding, returning from Nazi concentration camps and labour camps, or returning from the USSR. In 1945, the Department of Social Care alone claimed more than 60 per cent of the funds allocated to the CKŻP by the state, and this despite the fact that other CKŻP departments were also involved in welfare issues.[43] Similarly to the PZbWP, the CKŻP developed a diverse and wide-ranging assistance campaign: hostels, orphanages, boarding houses, and homes for the elderly and disabled were created; free meals were organised; food, clothing and medicines were given to the needy; cash payments were handed out; hospitals and clinics were established. No distinction was made between former camp prisoners and other survivors: the condition of those emerging from bunkers and hideouts, or returning from distant regions of the Soviet Union, was often no better than that of people liberated from Nazi camps.

In 1945 alone, the CKŻP provided material assistance to more than 35,000 people and ran, among others, 44 canteens, 22 night shelters, 14 clinics, eight orphanages, three sanatoria, one old people's home, and one home for the disabled.[44] The list is impressive, but in reality the situation was much worse. In the aforementioned facilities there was not only a lack of staff, but also of food, clothing and bedding. The assistance given to each person was extremely modest, and many had to go without help altogether. Thus, for instance, the Jewish Committee in Milanówek near Warsaw reported:

> Five per cent of our [400] dependants are passably clothed; the remaining 95 per cent wear tattered outer garments, usually summer ones. Even those who are working cannot afford to buy a shirt on account of the high prices. Most of our dependants have no change of underwear; they sleep under coats because they have nothing else with which to cover themselves, not even a blanket. The children cannot attend school as they have neither coats nor shoes. [...] The health of all the Jews, and especially the children, is such that they will require special nutrition for quite some time. Unfortu-

43 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 467.

44 Ibid., pp. 466-467.

> nately, approximately 60 per cent of our dependants cannot even afford a simple meal; they mostly live on bread and coffee.[45]

Equally alarming news came in from other committees. Overall, argues Skibińska, help for Holocaust survivors "was symbolic or half-hearted rather than real", and their situation was "de facto exceptionally difficult right up until the end of their stay in Poland".[46]

In its first year, the CKŻP relied almost exclusively on state subsidies. More substantial help for Jewish organisations from abroad did not begin to arrive until 1946. At the same time, state subsidies steadily decreased. According to official data, in 1947 the CKŻP fund amounted to over 920 million zlotys, of which 90 per cent came from abroad, in particular from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.[47] State subsidies accounted for barely six per cent of the committee's budget. Towards the end of the 1940s, social care for the Jewish population improved somewhat. This was due both to financial support from abroad and to the fact that many Jews had emigrated.

What the above description shows is that the burden of caring for Holocaust survivors rested entirely with Jewish institutions, primarily the CKŻP. This raises the question as to why the campaign to assist the Jewish population, including those rescued from Nazi concentration camps, was conducted independently of the campaign to assist other groups of victims. It would seem that, initially, the Polish authorities had intended to pursue a comprehensive assistance campaign that would have encompassed all Polish citizens returning from Nazi labour camps, concentration camps, and forced labour, regardless of their nationality. CKŻP representatives sat on the Interministerial Committee for the Provision of Care to Persons Liberated from Nazi Camps, appointed in February 1945.[48] The Jewish Committee was also represented on the Committee for the Provision of Assistance to Returnees Arriving from Germany, appointed in May 1945, which was affiliated to the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care.[49] A resolution was passed at that time to the effect that the new reception points would provide

45 Survey of the Committee of Polish Jews in Milanówek, no date. Quoted after: Skibińska, "Powroty ocalonych", pp. 539-540.

46 Skibińska, "Powroty ocalonych", p. 548.

47 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 452.

48 Circular of the Interministerial Committee for the Provision of Care to Persons Liberated from Nazi Camps, Lublin, 14 Feb. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 386; Meeting of the Council of Ministers, 19 Feb. 1945, AAN, URM 5/1097 (mcf. 23154).

49 Resolution of the Council of Ministers in the matter of care of returnees from Nazi camps, 26 May 1945, AAN, URM 5/1097 (mcf. 23154); Excerpt of minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ministers, 26 May 1945, AAN, MAP 2441 (mcf. B-47169); Official note regarding appointment of a Committee for the Provision of Assistance to Returnees Arriving from Germany, 30 May 1945, AAN, MPiOS 384.

assistance to all Polish citizens, regardless of their nationality. The Polish Red Cross was to be given the necessary funds to make one-off cash payments to returnees. No separate subsidies were earmarked for the CKŻP, which provoked protest from its members.[50] Due to the large influx of Polish Jews liberated from camps in Czechoslovakia, Germany and Austria, the Jewish Committee's expenditure steadily rose. Accordingly, the Minister of Public Administration was asked to allocate special funds to the CKŻP for the provision of care to camp survivors. Emil Sommerstein, who had been delegated to meet with the Minister, argued that Jews returning from the camps required special assistance, since they found themselves in a far worse situation than their Polish comrades in adversity. Unlike the Poles, they had no home or family to which they could return, and thus were completely reliant on the Jewish Committee's help.

The situation at the local level is illustrated by the example of Łódź. At a meeting convened in the summer of 1945 by the Governor of the Łódź Province in order to appoint a Coordinating Committee for the Provision of Care to Returnees Arriving from the West, a bitter dispute arose over the division of resources; on one side were delegates from the local Jewish Committee, and on the other the Governor, representatives of the Polish Red Cross, and representatives of the local Committee for Social Welfare (KOS).[51] Under the resolution adopted, the Jewish Committee was to receive only one per cent of the subsidies. The Governor argued that Jews accounted for one hundredth of the total number of returnees, and that therefore the proposed figure was fair. This was rejected by the Jewish Committee representative, who demanded 10 per cent of the funds. He argued that whereas only some of the Polish returnees required assistance, practically all of the Jews were in a pitiful state. The matter was referred to the Minister for Social Care, who decided, by way of compromise, that the Jewish Committee would receive five per cent of the subsidies allocated to Łódź for the purpose of assisting returnees from the West.[52]

In June, at another meeting of the Committee for the Provision of Assistance to Returnees Arriving from Germany, the CKŻP representative complained that, as evidenced by the reports received from provincial committees, the problem

50 Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH), Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/1-1b: Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 30 May 1945; Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 4 Jun. 1945.

51 Minutes of the meeting convened by the Governor of the Łódź Province in order to appoint a Coordinating Committee for the Provision of Care to Returnees Arriving from the West, 12 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 305.

52 Minutes of the meeting of the Provincial Coordinating Committee for the Provision of Care to Returnees Arriving from the West, Łódź, 19 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 306.

of assistance for Jews returning from the camps had still not been resolved.[53] In Łódź, for instance, the Jewish Committee was registering around 500 to 600 new arrivals daily, yet it had received virtually no subsidies. The situation was similar in Katowice: between 800 and 1,000 survivors were arriving each day[54], yet the local Jewish Committee had a budget of only 150,000 zlotys, while its counterpart in Poznań had received no funds at all. Meanwhile, the Polish Red Cross, instead of handing out cash payments to Jews, was referring them to the Jewish committees. In light of all this, the CKŻP representative demanded a fairer division of funds. In response, Tadeusz Leszczyński, the Plenipotentiary for Returnees Arriving from Germany, affiliated to the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Care, suggested that the CKŻP should ask the Ministry to separate completely the funds intended for the provision of care to Jews. Thus, contrary to the initial intention of the Polish authorities to create a comprehensive system of care, what emerged was a division of responsibility between Jewish committees on the one hand, and the Polish Red Cross, committees for social welfare, and other welfare institutions on the other.

Why was the CKŻP so keen to separate the help given to Jews from that given to other Polish citizens returning from the camps or from forced labour? Perhaps the Jewish tradition of self-help played a certain role here. To CKŻP representatives, for whom the inter-war period served as a model, a system of help for Jews that was not part of the general system of social care might have seemed obvious. Moreover, the CKŻP was counting on support from Jewish organisations abroad, which it could only receive if it organised its own system of social care. It seems, however, that the decisive factor in this dispute was the soon-to-be-justified fear on the part of CKŻP representatives that Jews would be discriminated against by the Polish Red Cross, the Central Committee for Social Welfare, and other welfare institutions, and that, ultimately, it would be local Jewish committees that would have to shoulder the burden of providing care to camp survivors. The CKŻP was also aware that in most cases Jews rescued from the camps were in a far worse condition than other people returning from German captivity, and in all likelihood they rightly believed that the state administration would be unable to meet survivors' needs. As mentioned earlier, the indolence of the state administration forced not only Jews, but also other groups of victims, to create their own self-help organisations. In view of the exceptionally difficult circumstances faced by Jewish survivors, their lack of integration with the rest of society, potential cultural differences, and the prevalence of anti-Semitic attitudes, such a division

53 Minutes of the meeting to discuss provision of care to former prisoners, 23 Jun. 1945, AAN, MPiOS 384.

54 These figures seem slightly inflated, though it is likely that this period coincided with a wave of arrivals.

of responsibility might have seemed the only rational solution. Irrespective of its causes, this situation could only widen the gap that already existed between Polish and Jewish survivors of Nazi camps.

Jews in the PZbWP

The isolation of Polish and Jewish former camp prisoners was also reflected in the activities of the PZbWP. It would appear that very few Jews belonged to the association; the majority were probably not at all interested in becoming members. Partisans and members of the resistance movement in the ghettos and camps belonged to separate Jewish veterans' organisations.[55] Those who mainly sought welfare assistance could apply to the Centra l Committee of Jews in Poland or other Jewish charitable organisations. Likewise, those who intended to emigrate probably felt no need to contact an organisation dominated by Polish political prisoners. Nevertheless, there did exist a small group of Jewish former prisoners who were interested in becoming members of the PZbWP; when submitting their application, they had to reckon with a variety of obstacles.

The association's statute left much unsaid in this regard. On the one hand, it stated that any citizen of Poland who had been imprisoned in a Nazi prison or concentration camp for their clandestine activities or for their social position or nationality could be a member of the association[56]; on the other, it declared that the association comprised people imprisoned "for freedom and democracy", which suggested that only those who had been incarcerated for political reasons would be accepted as members. As mentioned earlier, these contradictions gave rise to major disputes within the association and—depending on the vetting committee—were interpreted in various ways. The disputes did not directly relate to the nationality of people admitted to the PZbWP. However, whereas the adoption of a more rigorous interpretation entailed the exclusion of only certain categories of Polish prisoners from the association, Jews were almost completely barred as a consequence.

Although the rules and regulations of the PZbWP's Central Vetting Committee (GKW) from June 1946 stated that any person incarcerated on account of their nationality, whether "Polish, Jewish, etc.", could also be a member of the PZbWP provided that their captivity had lasted at least three months and that they had not "sullied the good name of political prisoners", over time, new conditions

55 For more on this subject see: Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce*.

56 Statute of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps, Warszawa 1946, AAN, PZbWP 9.

were added.[57] In its instruction to local vetting committees at the end of 1947, the GKW advised special caution in the case of people who had not been arrested for resistance activities but had been captured during a round-up, or taken hostage, or arrested on account of their nationality. Such a candidate would first have to prove that during the war he had been "a good Pole" and had "displayed a positive attitude towards the issue of independence".[58] To this end, the candidate would submit his wartime CV and provide references from witnesses, ideally members of the underground. A candidate who could not provide evidence of clandestine activity, and thus did not "bear the hallmarks of an ideological or political prisoner", could not in principle be admitted to the association.

Although in all likelihood these restrictions were not consciously directed against the Jewish community and should be seen in the wider context of efforts to transform the PZbWP from an association of victims into a veterans' organisation, they nonetheless led to the de facto exclusion of Jews from the association, since Jews were usually incarcerated not for their clandestine activities but on account of their race. Given the very small number of survivors, even those who had belonged to the resistance movement often could not call upon any witnesses. Another contentious issue was whether the PZbWP should admit only concentration camp and death camp prisoners or also the survivors of labour camps. Many labour camps had been designated exclusively, or almost exclusively, for Jews. Members of the CKŻP, too, had doubts about the definition of political prisoner that had been adopted by the association. At a meeting convened in January 1946, the CKŻP's Presidium debated the composition of its delegation to the PZbWP's founding congress, to which it had been invited: some committee members believed that only true political prisoners should be sent to the congress, while others argued that the delegation should also include those who had not belonged to the resistance movement but who had been incarcerated on account of their race.[59]

Particularly in the years 1946-1947, when the association's admissions criteria had not yet been clarified, much depended on the attitude of the various vetting committees, whose decisions were guided, most probably, by their understanding of the PZbWP's profile. However, the unclear rules for admitting people to the association were often used to discriminate against people of Jewish origin; in any case, this is how the applicants often saw it. In a letter sent in the spring of 1946 to the PZbWP's Executive Board, Zygmunt J., a former inmate of Mauthausen, complained that he had applied for membership to the association's Kraków Branch in the autumn of the previous year. The decision, he reported, had been continually

57 Regulations of the GKW PZbWP, 21 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 28.

58 Instruction for vetting committees of local groups and branches of the PZbWP, 1 Dec. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28.

59 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 3 Jan. 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP 303/I/2a.

delayed for formal reasons. In the end he was told that concentration camp prisoners such as he, who had been "taken from the ghettos to the camps, will probably not be considered—although the matter has not yet been resolved". "I understood that they were referring to Jewish prisoners."[60] Zygmunt J. asked whether the decision complied with the GKW's instructions. In response to an interpellation sent from Warsaw on this matter, the Executive Board of the PZbWP's Kraków Branch explained that Zygmunt J. had been informed that the vetting rules and regulations were still in the development phase and that therefore the branch was not admitting any new members: "We provided this information when asked by the person concerned whether former prisoners of Jewish nationality could become members of the association. At that time, the issue of admitting Jews to the association had not yet been resolved."[61] The authors of the letter went on to quote the secretary of the PZbWP's Executive Board, who, at a meeting of the association's Kraków Branch in June, had stated that "inmates of the ghetto" should not be admitted to the association because "the Jewish ghetto is synonymous with the Poland that remained entirely behind barbed wire".[62] Therefore, the association should only admit Jews who had been political prisoners, just as it only admitted Poles who met this criterion. From this statement, the Executive Board of the PZbWP's Kraków Branch inferred, the Jews who had been incarcerated on account of their race could not become members of the PZbWP.[63]

A similar conflict arose in September 1946 in the town of Wejherowo, at the opposite end of Poland, where the Executive Board of the local PZbWP branch refused a former Stutthof prisoner ("W.") admission to the association. Despite the prior intervention of the Wejherowo Jewish Committee, the Executive Board in Gdańsk did not take an active interest in the matter until an article entitled "The Executors of [Amon] Goeth's Will" appeared in the *Dziennik Bałtycki* daily. The reporter wrote as follows:

> A Jewish resident of Wejherowo, who is a Polish citizen and a former inmate of Stutthof […] recently applied to become a member of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners. […] A few days ago his application was returned to him together with the vetting committee's decision, which was signed by three prominent members of the association. The committee's decision was limited to a single word: "Declined". On 13 September, this former Stutthof prisoner, who had been refused admission to the Association of Former Political Prisoners, contacted the secretary of the associa-

60 Zygmunt J. to the ZG PZbWP, 25 May 1946, AAN, PZbWP 150.

61 Letter of the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP to the ZG PZbWP, 1 Jul. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 150.

62 Minutes of the general assembly of delegates of the Kraków Provincial Branch of the PZbWP, 23 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 143.

63 Letter of the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP to the ZG PZbWP, 1 Jul. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 150.

> tion to enquire as to the reasons for the refusal of his application. The kind-hearted secretary, not wanting to prolong the matter unnecessarily, and wishing to dispel any lingering doubts, amended the vetting committee's decision, supplementing the word "Declined" with the words: "as the candidate is not of Aryan descent". Since the rejected candidate was left somewhat dumbstruck by this unexpected reappearance of abandoned terminology, the secretary further clarified that the vetting committee's decision had been made in accordance with the association's new statute.[64]

Concerned about the risk of bad publicity, the chairman of the provincial PZbWP suspended the Wejherowo vetting committee and ordered the branch leadership to provide an explanation.[65] The fate of "W." is not known, but in October of that year, at a meeting of the Branch Executive Board, the chairman informed those present that the entire matter had been resolved "without reproach" for the members of the Branch Executive Board, who had all been restored to their former duties.[66]

Despite the many conflicts and obstacles, however, Jews were not completely excluded from the PZbWP. There were even cases where members of local vetting committees proposed that the admissions criteria be relaxed in order to accept more Jews into the association. Thus, for instance, one member of the Kraków PZbWP's leadership, in a letter to the GKW in September 1947, suggested that people who had been imprisoned in the Płaszów, Skarżysko-Kamienna and Częstochowa labour camps should also be admitted to the association, since the conditions there had been comparable to those in the concentration camps.[67] Representatives of the Jewish community were invited to the association's ceremonies and commemorations and vice versa—association delegates participated in events organised by the CKŻP and local Jewish committees. Bernard Borg sat on the association's Executive Board as the CKŻP's official representative in all but name.[68]

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64 "Wykonawcy testamentu Goetha" (bem), *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 21 Sep. 1946.

65 Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Branch Executive Board (ZO) of the PZbWP in Gdańsk, 25 Sep. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 101.

66 Minutes of the meeting of the ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk, 14 Oct. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 101.

67 Zofia Mączka, Vetting Committee of the Kraków Branch of the PZbWP, to the GKW PZbWP, 9 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 151.

68 Leadership personnel list of the ZG PZbWP, no date (1947-1949), AAN, PZbWP 11. Before the war Bernard Borg had been a member of the Communist Party of Poland; during the occupation he had belonged to the Jewish Fighting Organization and the PPR, and had participated in the Warsaw ghetto uprising; in the years 1943-1945 he had been imprisoned in Majdanek and Auschwitz. After the war he was a member of the PPR faction affiliated to the CKŻP. In 1945 he was chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Committee (KŻ). From 1946 a member of the ZG PZbWP. Information cited after: Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce*, p. 177.

Although in Poland, in order to avoid friction with the PZbWP, members of the CKŻP often spoke of the solidarity between Polish and Jewish prisoners, and their common fate, on the international arena the CKŻP preferred to maintain a separate identity. This concealed a fear that Jewish martyrdom would be appropriated by Polish political prisoners and, more broadly, that Jewish losses would be subsumed within the losses of the individual countries of which Jews were citizens. Already at the first international congress of former political prisoners, which took place in Warsaw in February 1946, a bitter conflict arose when the CKŻP insisted on sending its own delegation. The main opponents of this idea were not the Poles, but the Danes, Dutch and French.[69] A representative of the Danish *Landsforeningen af Besaettelsestidens Politiske Fanger* insisted that members of the CKŻP should be part of the Polish delegation, just as Jews in Denmark were represented by the Danish delegation. He warned against setting a precedent, since Jews from other European countries could make similar demands.

In the end, the CKŻP managed to win over the other congress participants, but it was only a temporary victory. Another dispute arose over the composition of the Polish delegation to the second FIAPP congress, which was to take place in Brussels in the summer of 1946. At a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium convened on the eve of the congress, Ignacy Falk (PPR) stated that, in light of the opposition from "Polish reactionary elements" to the idea of separate CKŻP representation, Polish Jews should join the general delegation of the PZbWP.[70] Likewise, Salo Fiszgrund (a Bund member) shared the belief that it was better to back down given the tension in Polish–Jewish relations. A different view was put forward by Adolf Berman (Poale Zion Left): "Jews were persecuted as Jews," he argued. "At the congress, we should be represented as the Jewish nation. The CKŻP is, so to speak, the vanguard of world Jewry. If this were a Polish congress, then we would offer far-reaching concessions, but not when it comes to an international congress. We must not capitulate as a nation. In future, the way we shall deal with this is that the delegation of Polish Jews will come to an agreement with Jewish delegations around the world." It is no accident that it was precisely the Zionist representatives who most wanted to send a separate delegation, while PPR and Bund members were more willing to compromise—the extermination of European Jewry was the principal argument in the campaign to establish the state of Israel. Ultimately, it was decided that Adolf Berman would consult his brother Jakub, a member of the Political Bureau of the PPR, by telephone. Jakub Berman, sharing the opinion of his party colleague, Ignacy Falk, said that if other countries were also not

69 Report of the Jewish delegation to the FIAPP Congress on 3-6 Feb. 1946, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/35.

70 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 20 Jul. 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP 303/I/3a.

sending separate Jewish delegations, then the CKŻP representatives should join the PZbWP delegation, although the association should grant them significant autonomy and allow them to make separate speeches. Finally, it was decided to put the matter before the congress participants. In Brussels, however, the Jewish Committee delegates suffered a total defeat. Their demands were rejected not only by the PZbWP but also by practically all other prisoners' organisations. As one congress participant later recounted at a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, "they all declared themselves to be philo-Semites" and on this basis objected to Jewish prisoners being isolated from the other delegations. The Belgian delegate had argued that "Jews suffered the most at the hands of racists, so they should not try to isolate themselves".[71] The CKŻP representatives were eventually forced to join the Polish delegation.

On the one hand, therefore, the PZbWP's policy led to the increasing exclusion of Jews; on the other, under pressure at home and abroad, Jewish camp survivors acted on the international arena as part of the Polish political prisoner community.

"A Separate Death"?[72]

In more recent works on memory of the Second World War, it is often claimed that, until the mid-1960s, neither in Western Europe nor in the United States was the unique character of the genocide perpetrated on European Jews fully understood; this lack of understanding also applies to Palestinian and Israeli Jews and to the Jewish diaspora. As Tom Segev shows in his excellent book *The Seventh Million*, despite the establishment by the Knesset of Holocaust and Ghetto Revolt Remembrance Day (*Yom Hashoah U'Mered HaGetaot*, 1951) and the creation of the Yad Vashem Institute (1953), in Israel, until the 1960s, the Holocaust remained a matter for the personal memory of survivors. It was not until after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 that the Shoah came to be seen as one of the fundamental pillars of Israeli national identity.[73] Likewise, Harold Marcuse, in his study of the disputes surrounding the commemoration of the site of the former Dachau concentration camp, notes that until the 1960s neither Israelis nor Jews from the diaspora nor indeed non-Jews were involved in commemorat-

71 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 26 Jul. 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP 303/I/3a.

72 Text of Józef Sack's speech, *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej* (BŻAP) 58/306, 20 Jun. 1947.

73 Segev, *The seventh million*. Cf. also: Friedländer, "Memory of the Shoah in Israel", p. 151; Sznaider, "Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg. Berichte zur Geschichte der Erinnerung—Israel".

ing Holocaust victims.[74] A similar conclusion is reached by Pieter Lagrou in his study on changing public perceptions of the Second World War in West European countries:

> [...] the experience of the Jews and the discovery of the systematic killing of Jewish "deportees" made far less impression than the "concentration", bad treatment and underfeeding of the other deportees, which resulted in relatively high death rates and the often shocking physical condition of the returning survivors. A large proportion of Jews deported from Western Europe had transited through the concentration camps on their way to extermination and a small number of them survived the liberation. This fact contributed to their assimilation into the undifferentiated mass of "deportees". It seems to the contemporary observer that [in that period] the awareness, the *prise de conscience*, of the specificity of the Jewish experience in the universe of Nazi persecution had not permeated public opinion….[75]

Lagrou later adds:

> To attempt such a study [on the perception of the Shoah] for the two decades before 1965 would evince an anachronistic state of mind, since the very dimensions of the continental tragedy, as manifested in contemporary terminology, were very slow to emerge, even amongst professional historians.[76]

The above observations do not apply in the case of Poland, however. In fact, it would seem that the process moved in exactly the opposite direction: whereas in the 1940s the Holocaust was still present in public discourse, over subsequent decades it became a powerful taboo. One explanation for this is that until the end of the 1940s, Jewish Holocaust survivors constituted a small but statistically significant proportion of Polish society and could present their views in the wider debate on the war and occupation. Furthermore, unlike the Americans or even the West Europeans, Poles and Polish Jews had witnessed the Holocaust at close quarters, and the scale and character of the genocide was beyond doubt in Poland.

In the second half of the 1940s, the Jewish community in Poland was not only well aware of the uniqueness of its own experience but also attempted to bring this knowledge to the wider public both at home and abroad. This task was principally entrusted to the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH) affiliated to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP). The commission was

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74 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, p. 266. On the subject of awareness of the Holocaust in the USA see, inter alia: Peter Novick, "Holocaust Memory in America" in *The Art of Memory*; idem, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston/NY 1999; Gulie Ne'eman Arad, "Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg. Berichte zur Geschichte der Erinnerung—USA", in *Verbrechen erinnern.*

75 Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, p. 252.

76 Ibid., p. 254.

established in Lublin in December 1944[77]; its chairman was Filip Friedman, who was succeeded in 1946 by Nachman Blumental. In the autumn of 1947, the CŻKH was transformed into the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH). The commission was involved in gathering documentation and doing research as well as disseminating knowledge about Jewish history.

The importance that both the Zionists and representatives of other political parties attributed to the work of the commission is evidenced by a statement made by the chairman of the Kraków Jewish Committee, Leon Kupferberg, in August 1945. At the founding meeting of the Association of the Friends of the Central Jewish Historical Commission, Kupferberg said that, in view of the upcoming congress, "at which the political aspirations of the Jewish nation" were to be supported by historical evidence, it was necessary to redouble efforts in order to assemble as much documentation as possible by that time.[78] Barely a month later, one participant of a strategy meeting held by the CŻKH in Łódź stated that the commission's most pressing task was to ensure that its publications were present "at the next peace conference".[79]

Although the commission often doubted whether its activities would have any impact at all on changing the attitudes of Polish society, it did not abandon its efforts to reach a domestic audience. To this end, the CŻKH produced Polish-language publications and the commission's expert witnesses participated in the trials of Nazi war criminals before the Supreme National Tribunal (NTN). An important propaganda role was also played by the occasional speeches of representatives of the Jewish community at such events as the annual Majdanek Week, successive anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the opening of the Auschwitz Museum in the summer of 1947. Jewish historians also sat on the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP), established in the spring of 1945.

Polish Jews did not use the terms "Holocaust" or "Shoah". When referring to Nazi genocide, they used such phrases as: "mass extermination", "total eradica-

77 More on the subject of the establishment and work of the CŻKH has been written by: Natalia Aleksiun, "Reconstructing History and Rescuing Memory: The Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland, 1944–1947", *Polin* 20 (2008), passim; Stephan Stach, "Geschichtsschreibung und politische Vereinnahmung. Das Jüdische Historische Institut in Warschau 1947-1968" in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 7 (2008), pp. 402-410.

78 Minutes of the organisational meeting of the Association of the Friends of the Historical Commission in Kraków, 24 Aug. 1945, AŻIH, CŻKH 336/151.

79 Minutes of the CŻKH's second strategy meeting, 19-20 Sep. 1945, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/12.

tion", "complete liquidation", or "historical tragedy".[80] In the introduction to a collection of documents on the Jewish resistance movement published in 1946, Michał Maksymilian Borwicz (Boruchowicz), who worked with the Central Jewish Historical Commission, wrote that during the Second World War "there was no other nation which, as a whole, found itself in a situation comparable to that of the Jews", although, he noted, "there were groups, indeed very large groups, whose situation was very similar to that of the Jews".[81] No less emphatic was Nachman Blumental in his expert opinion submitted to the trial of Auschwitz staff at the end of 1947: "The following data may serve as evidence of the magnitude of losses to the Jewish nation and of the inexpressible cruelty of the Germans towards the Jews, who, under the Nazis' unwritten law, were condemned to total extermination, without exception. Of the 3.5 million Jews who lived in Poland before the war, barely a few tens of thousands were alive after liberation, and not because the German authorities had shown them any mercy, but simply because they had either not known of their existence or had not managed to liquidate them in time."[82] In a commentary on the trial, the Zionist weekly *Nasze Słowo* [Our Word] wrote that the trial presented an opportunity to inform the world, including Palestinian and American Jews who had not personally experienced Nazi persecution, that the Jewish nation held "tragic primacy" amongst the victims of fascism.[83]

The use of a separate notion to describe the genocide of European Jews implies a certain way of thinking about this event. The terms "Shoah" and "Holocaust", which did not come into widespread use until the 1970s, emphasised not only the uniqueness of the Jews' fate compared to that of other groups of victims, but also the uniqueness of the crime in historical terms. Polish Jews, however, even if they did so using different language, had already by the 1940s formulated the idea that the extermination of the Jewish nation was an historical phenomenon. The uniqueness of this crime derived primarily from its gigantic scale and industrial and bureaucratic character. As Filip Friedman stated at a meeting of the CŻKH, the catastrophe that had befallen the Jewish nation was "one of the greatest in history as far as quantitative and qualitative losses are concerned, surpassing all previous catastrophes in

80 Foreword to *Dokumenty zbrodni i męczeństwa*, Michał Borwicz, Nella Rost and Józef Wulf (eds), Kraków 1945, pp. X, XV; Friedman, Preface to *Dokumenty i materiały*, Vol. I *(Obozy)*, compiled by Nachman Blumental, Łódź 1946, p. I; Nachman Blumental, "Żydowska ekspertyza w procesie Hoessa (Fragment wystąpienia przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym)", *Nasze Słowo*, 31 Mar. 1947.

81 Michał Borwicz, Foreword to *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach. Materiały i dokumenty*, Betti Ajzensztajn (ed.), Warszawa–Łódź–Kraków 1946, p. VIII.

82 Nachman Blumental, "Teoria zagłady narodów (Fragment ekspertyzy Blumentala przygotowanej na proces załogi oświęcimskiej)", *Nasze Słowo*, 19 Dec. 1947.

83 "Na posterunku. 40 z Oświęcimia", *Nasze Słowo*, 1 Dec. 1947.

terms of the scale of the crime—an organised and premeditated plan to annihilate millions of people".[84] Michał Borwicz, in turn, wrote that the situation of the Jews during the occupation "has no precedent in human history. No other persecution in recorded history has been so cruel. [...] No other occupying regime's behaviour has been so utterly base and yet so meticulously planned. Never before has persecution been organised with such a huge amount of effort."[85]

A key element of this martyrology was the experience of the camps. In a speech given at the opening of the Auschwitz Museum in June 1947, Józef Sack, a parliamentary deputy and CKŻP member, said that the Jews were the nation which "had sacrificed the most blood" and whose torment "cannot be compared with anything in the history of humankind". There in Auschwitz, he continued, 1.5 million Jews had perished in the gas chambers, "and their only crime was that they were Jews. [...] Millions of Jews died a separate death, a Jewish death, isolated in its painful chosenness, in Treblinka, Sobibór, Bełżec and Majdanek...."[86] CŻKH members emphasised that, in the case of Jews, their very identity was tantamount to a death sentence or transportation to the camps. In the introduction to a collection of accounts of camp life published in 1946, Blumental wrote that although in the case of other nationalities, too, "the number of people sent to the camps on the basis of a court judgement or investigation or decision was insignificant" and that "any reason (e.g., being denounced, falling victim to the caprice of a Nazi dignitary, or getting caught in a round-up) was usually sufficient for a person to find himself behind barbed wire, the situation of Jews was nevertheless far worse: "it was enough that someone was a Jew for him to be sent to a camp".[87] The author also pointed out that when in captivity, Jews and non-Jews were treated differently. For Jews, the camps necessarily resulted in "total extermination". "Although some Jews did manage to leave the camps in one piece, they were the exceptions rather than the rule; their survival was a 'miracle'—there simply had not been time to 'liquidate' them".[88]

In the first years after the war, there was also no single, accepted classification of the camps, while from the Jewish perspective the distinction between ghettos, labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps seemed fluid. Filip Friedman drew attention to the problem of categorising the camps. He argued against using Nazi terminology, since its purpose had been to obfuscate.[89] Instead, he proposed a functional

84 Minutes of the CŻKH's second strategy meeting, 19-20 Sep. 1945, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/12.

85 Borwicz, Foreword to *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach*, pp. VII-VIII.

86 Text of Józef Sack's speech, BŻAP 58/306, 20 Jun. 1947.

87 Nachman Blumental, "Obozy niemieckie w Polsce w latach 1939-1945" in *Dokumenty i materiały*, Vol. I (*Obozy*), pp. 7-8.

88 Ibid., p. 4.

89 Friedman, Preface to *Dokumenty i materiały*, Vol. I (*Obozy*), pp. I-V.

classification: labour camps, penal camps, protective custody camps, prisoner-of-war camps, and death camps. Omitted from this list were concentration camps, which Friedman regarded as a collective term that referred to all Nazi camps. In practice, however, it was often the case that no clear categorisation was used at all. Although Chełmno, the "Operation Reinhard" camps[90], Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Majdanek were often described as "death camps" or "extermination camps", these terms were sometimes extended to other camps. Unlike their Polish counterparts, Jewish authors were also reluctant to introduce a clear distinction between labour camps and concentration camps. Whereas some Polish political prisoners were keen to emphasise their dissimilarity to inmates of labour camps and penal camps, which elevated them as heroes of the resistance movement, such a division did not seem justified from the Jewish perspective. Blumental stressed that although the Nazis had created many categories of camps, in practice there was little to choose between them. De facto, all the camps, with the exception of prisoner-of-war camps for soldiers from Western countries, "had a single purpose: to destroy the people incarcerated within them".[91] Blumental also pointed out that most of these places had been forgotten. "The names of the famous camps—Dachau [...], Buchenwald, [...] Bergen-Belsen—are known around the world; after the liberation of Poland, a little more was discovered about Treblinka, Sobibór, Majdanek, Bełżec, and Auschwitz, and that's about it! What we forget, however, is that beside virtually every large factory or mine was a labour camp where the workers were slowly destroyed through slave labour. In practice, therefore, every labour camp was a death camp. The only difference between the two was the rate at which people died: in the labour camps, death came more slowly."[92] Among Polish publications, titles devoted to the concentration camps were dominant. The CŻKH tried to bridge this gap. Thus, for instance, in a volume entitled *Documents and Materials* published in 1946, Blumental included accounts of the labour camps in Trawniki, Poniatowa, Stalowa Wola, and other places.[93] Filip Friedman, who, as director of the CŻKH, also sat on the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, sought to ensure that the Polish expert opinion submitted to the Nuremberg trials would also include information on labour camps for Jews.[94]

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90 This was the cryptonym used to refer to the Nazi campaign to exterminate the Jewish population of the General Government (1941-1943). Among the "Operation Reinhard" camps were Sobibór, Treblinka II, and Bełżec (*Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, edited by Dariusz Libionka, Warszawa 2004).

91 Blumental, "Obozy niemieckie w Polsce", p. 5.

92 Ibid., p. 4.

93 *Dokumenty i materiały*, Vol. I (*Obozy*).

94 Natalia Aleksiun, "Organizing for Justice: Jewish Leadership in Poland and the Trial of the Nazi War Criminals at Nuremberg" in Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (eds) *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour: Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution. Proceedings of the International Conference 2006*, Osnabrück 2008.

For Poles and Polish Jews alike, Auschwitz-Birkenau acquired, shortly after its liberation, the status of the primary symbol of wartime martyrdom. Certainly, one of the principal reasons for this was its huge number of victims; no less important, it would seem, was its international character.[95] All this, and the fact that it had been one of the few concentration camps with an organised resistance movement, turned Auschwitz into an unquestioned place of remembrance and a perfect tool of propaganda. Furthermore, a relatively large number of people survived Auschwitz; after the war, they not only published numerous memoirs, thus shaping the public imagination, but also tried to ensure that the victims of the camp were commemorated. In Poland, the majority of Auschwitz survivors were Polish political prisoners. It is no wonder, then, that the site had a critical importance for the Polish authorities and PZbWP membership on the one hand, and the Jewish community on the other.

At the end of March 1945, the Presidium of the National Homeland Council (KRN) took the decision to appoint a Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Auschwitz. One member of the commission, the chairman of the Kraków Jewish Committee, Leon Kupferberg, wrote in a letter to the CŻKH that the urgency with which the Polish government had created the commission suggested that it wanted to use Nazi crimes in Auschwitz as a "political trump card" during the United Nations conference in San Francisco. Kupferberg went on to express his fear that both the chairman of the commission (the Minister of Justice, Edmund Zalewski) and the Minister of Culture (Wincenty Rzymowski) intended to highlight Nazi crimes against the Polish nation whilst ignoring Jewish victims. Kupferberg's proposal that representatives of world Jewry should be invited to participate in research work and in publications for the general public, as well as in the creation of a future Auschwitz museum, had apparently not met with the approval of Polish government representatives, "who stressed that the planned work would primarily be of importance to Polish policy".[96] Kupferberg wrote:

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95 According to the most recent studies, a total of 1-1.5 million people perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau; estimates from the 1940s were close to four million, and on occasion even six million victims. See: Franciszek Piper, *Ilu ludzi zginęło w KL Auschwitz. Liczba ofiar w świetle źródeł i badań 1945-1990*, Oświęcim 1992; idem, "Weryfikacja strat osobowych w obozie koncentracyjnym w Oświęcimiu", *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, 2 (1994).

96 Report on the organisational meeting of the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Auschwitz held in Kraków on 29 Mar. 1945, letter dated 31 Mar. 1945, AŻIH, CŻKH 336/33. The letter is not signed, but from the context we may deduce that its author must have been Leon Kupferberg, the chairman of the Kraków Jewish Committee. The author is referring to the audience that was the founding conference of the United Nations Organization (UN), which was held in San Francisco in April-June 1945. Ultimately, the Provisional Government did not attend the conference. Nevertheless, Poland was one of the 51 founder states to ratify the UN Charter on 15 October 1945.

> Having at its disposal a ready-made academic and technical apparatus, and having spent an initial sum of five million zlotys, the government is undoubtedly in a position to gather the materials quickly and, without waiting for a far-reaching academic study […], may publish, as is planned, a multilingual work that will bring the Nazis' crimes against the Polish nation to the attention of world opinion but that might pay only scant regard to our own martyrdom. [...] By mentioning the number of Jewish victims, the government would undermine the effect it wants to achieve through the publication of this work and thus defeat its purpose. And even if the government, in this work, does add the number of Jewish victims (those who were Polish citizens) to the total number of Polish victims, foreign opinion may be unaware of the relative size of these two groups and ignore the fact that Jewish victims are not only more numerous than their Polish counterparts but that their suffering and survivor numbers are in no way comparable. And herein lies the danger of producing chaos in the mind of the civilised world; chaos which may do great harm to us if—let us be frank—we too wish (as undoubtedly we do) to use our own martyrdom as political capital in the achievement of our national aims and aspirations.

Filip Friedman's work *To jest Oświęcim!* [This was Oswiecim…], published in the same year, should be seen as a response to the above concerns.[97] In this brochure, the CŻKH director, whilst noting the international character of Auschwitz, nevertheless emphasised that the "lion's share of the victims" of Auschwitz were Jews from Poland and other European countries, and that it was primarily they who provided "the human material for gassing".[98] Friedman also wrote that the situation of the Jews in Auschwitz was comparable only to that of the Roma and Soviet prisoners of war. "Certain nations were sent to the Auschwitz torture chamber without mercy and, with very few exceptions, to their death. There was no return from Auschwitz for Soviet prisoners of war, for Jews from all countries, all estates and professions, regardless of sex or age, and for Gypsies. Only very few members of these national groups were spared, in other words, sent to other camps or kept in Auschwitz for work."[99] Friedman continued: "when it came to transports of Jews, approximately 60 to 90 per cent of the transport would [...] after the initial selection procedure, be sent straight to the gas chambers. The 'Aryan' transports were handled differently. Many of those transports were sent to the camp in their entirety, bypassing the selection procedure." However, as Friedman pointed out, there were also many "Aryan" transports that were immediately sent for extermination, without any pre-selection. "This was evidently the case with those whom the Nazis regarded as particularly 'serious criminals'. It was in this manner that many transports of Poles, Russians, French, Greeks,

97 Filip Friedman, *To jest Oświęcim*, Warszawa 1945.
98 Ibid., p. 86.
99 Ibid., p. 12.

Yugoslavs, Gypsies, and others were sent to their death."[100] The work appeared in English a year after its first publication.[101]

The concern expressed by the chairman of the Kraków Jewish Committee that the Polish authorities would seek to take advantage of the Auschwitz issue at the United Nations' founding conference proved to be premature, since the Polish delegation did not, in the end, travel to San Francisco. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why the Auschwitz Commission's work slackened considerably. From mid-April, the investigation of Nazi crimes in Auschwitz was being handled by only a few members of its legal subcommittee. In May, the commission was transformed into a subdivision of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP), headed by Jan Sehn.[102]

Jan Sehn (centre) and Otto Wolken (left), a former inmate of Auschwitz-Birkenau, examining the ruins of one of the crematoria in Birkenau (courtesy of APMAB).

100 Ibid., p. 25.

101 Filip Friedman, *This was Oswiecim: the Story of a Murder Camp*, London 1946.

102 Report on the work of the Kraków Branch of the GKBZNwP "from the beginning of its existence until today", signed by Jan Sehn and Edward Pęchalski, 18 Dec. 1945; text entitled: "Do Prezydium KRN. Pierwsze sprawozdanie miesięczne GKBZNwP", no date, signed by Jerzy Kornacki and Stanisław Janusz. Quoted after: *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce i jej oddziały terenowe w 1945 roku. Wybór dokumentów*, Mieczysław Motas (ed.), Warszawa 1995, pp. 28-31, 81-93.

A summary of the GKBZNwP's investigation into Auschwitz-Birkenau only appeared in 1946, published in the first issue of the commission's Bulletin. Although the author of the expert study, Jan Sehn, devoted much attention to the martyrdom of the Poles, he did not hide the fact that the Auschwitz death camp had been primarily intended for the Jewish population. The study contained a separate chapter entitled "The Extermination of Jews", in which the author unequivocally stated that "for Polish Jews, as for Jews from other European countries, Auschwitz was primarily a death camp".[103] He also noted that, whereas other nationalities deported to Auschwitz were usually sent to work, "on average, only around 10 per cent of the people from Jewish transports were admitted to the camp".[104] Other GKBZNwP publications from the years 1946-1951, including a study on the "Operation Reinhard", Chełmno, Majdanek, and Stutthof camps, also presented a fairly accurate picture of the genocide perpetrated on European Jews.

Likewise, the judgement in the trial of Rudolf Höss of April 1947, despite errors and inaccuracies, was quite precise in its presentation of the numbers and dissimilar fate of each category of victim. Höss was found guilty of having committed crimes against three groups of victims, which were mentioned in the grounds of the judgement. The first was registered prisoners, the majority of whom were "Polish citizens: Poles and Jews; as far as the citizens of other countries are concerned, most were of Jewish origin".[105] The court established the number of registered prisoners at 400,000, of whom at least two-thirds died as a result of the terrible living conditions, criminal medical experiments, or as a result of selection. It was also noted that all the Roma who had been registered in the camp were exterminated in the gas chambers of Birkenau. The second category of victim comprised "those who had been brought to the camp from various European countries for the purpose of immediate extermination, and who were taken straight to the gas chambers without being registered".[106] The court estimated that there were at least 2.5 million such victims. It was noted that these victims were "mostly Jews" but that "occasionally" there had also been "Aryan transports"; the population which the Nazis had forcibly expelled from the Zamość region was cited as an example.[107] Soviet prisoners of war were mentioned as a separate, third category of victim. The court established that there had been approximately 12,000 POWs

103 Jan Sehn, "Obóz zagłady Oświęcim", *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce* 1 (1946), p. 79.

104 Ibid., pp. 80, 83, 120.

105 "Sentencja wyroku w sprawie Rudolfa Hössa" (2 Apr. 1947) in Tadeusz Cyprian and Jerzy Sawicki (eds), *Siedem procesów przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, Warszawa 1962, pp. 113-114.

106 Ibid., pp. 115-116.

107 Ibid., p. 118.

registered in the camp, the majority of whom were slaughtered immediately or died in captivity. In addition, as stated in the grounds of the judgement, tens of thousands of POWs were exterminated in the gas chambers without prior registration.[108]

At the same time, the judgement emphasised the martyrology of Poles through the identification of potential as well as actual victims:

> In light of the outcome of the trial, there is no doubt that the Nazis intended to continue with the gassing of people on a mass scale. The best evidence of this is the fact […], supported by the documentation, that they had planned to build Crematorium No. VI in Birkenau, which was to be so efficient that it would be possible to gas and incinerate one million people during a single year. Therefore, it was only the victorious advance of the Soviet and Polish armies that prevented the Nazis from implementing their further plans of genocide.[109]

According to the grounds of the judgement, next in line for extermination were the Slavic nations, primarily the Poles. This view was expressed earlier in the trial in the testimony of Józef Cyrankiewicz, who stated that the concentration camps had borne witness to the "mechanised—one could say 'modern', in the sense of technological advancement—destruction of a huge community. In future, [the Nazis] would have undoubtedly set about destroying the Slavic nations, particularly the Polish nation, after the prelude that was the extermination of the Jews."[110] A similar argument was put forward in a great many statements and publications from the period; even some Jewish historians made reference to it. Nachman Blumental, an expert witness in the Höss trial, confirmed that the Holocaust had been merely a prologue to the extermination of other nationalities. There was ample evidence to suggest, he argued, that "the Nazis' ultimate aim had not been to exterminate only the Jews":

> They were rebuilding the Majdanek death camp at a time when there were virtually no Jews left. They were building a new crematorium, and reserves of Zyklon B—enough to kill four million people—were discovered in warehouses after the liberation. The same is true of the death camp in Auschwitz, the expansion of which was prevented only by the victorious advance of the Allied armies. The question remains, therefore—for whom was all this intended? The answer was given by the witnesses at the Nuremberg trial [...]. Höss also knew about it. He related how, at a conference in Berlin in the presence of the Nazi top brass, the extermination of 30 million Slavs had

108 Ibid., p. 117.

109 Ibid., p. 113.

110 Józef Cyrankiewicz, "O Oświęcimiu walczącym (głos J. Cyrankiewicza—świadka w procesie Hössa)", *Polska* 11 (1964), p. 16.

been discussed.[111] For us, this conference clarified in no uncertain terms the ultimate principle of Nazism, the true meaning of "Lebensraum".[112]

It is a moot point whether the use of such arguments by representatives of Poland's Jewish community was a tactical move motivated by a desire to join the wider Polish debate on the subject of the Second World War without having to lay their own cards on the table. The minutes of the discussion on Blumental's expert opinion, which took place at the CŻKH a few days before the trial, would seem to favour this interpretation. One participant of the meeting suggested that the text should "differentiate more clearly between the situation of Jews in the camps and that of other nationalities".[113] In response, Blumental said that it would be pointless to emphasise such differences, "since this is not the right time to be saying it; instead, we should concentrate on dealing with our common enemy".

It would seem, therefore, that in the immediate post-war years the Polish Communists did not wish to turn the Holocaust into a taboo and that the employees of state institutions such as the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland or the Supreme National Tribunal could also broach the subject in the public domain. In this context, the attitude of the PZbWP is all the more telling. The line adopted by the association's magazine, *Wolni Ludzie*, was that the social isolation of Jewish former prisoners (which was discussed in the previous chapter) also affected the way in which the reality of the camps was perceived by their Polish comrades in captivity. Despite declarations that Jewish camp prisoners were treated as "friends"[114] and that "the tragedy of Polish Jews was not only a tragedy of the Jewish people, but also and in parallel a tragedy of the entire Polish nation"[115], in reality, Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust were seen as not belonging to the community of victims. This attitude seemed to be characteristic not only of the ex-prisoner community, but also of significant sections of Polish society; its origins lay in the pre-war era. Already in 1987, Alina Cała put forward the idea that Jews had been portrayed as "alien" in Polish folk culture.[116] As regards memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust, this observation was confirmed by the German historian Klaus-Peter Friedrich in his analysis of the official and underground Polish press in the years 1942-1946/1947. Friedrich writes:

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111 Blumental probably had in mind here Master Plan East (*Generalplan Ost*), a plan devised during the war by the Reich Main Security Office (*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA).

112 Blumental, "Żydowska ekspertyza w procesie Hoessa (Fragment wystąpienia przed NTN)", *Nasze Słowo*, 31 Mar. 1947.

113 Minutes of the meeting of CKŻKH employees, 21 Mar. 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/14.

114 "Do Towarzyszy z obozów koncentracyjnych", *Wolni Ludzie*, March 1947.

115 "Z naszej perspektywy. Nie wolno przejść obok niej obojętnie", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jul. 1947.

116 Alina Cała, *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej*, Warszawa 1987.

"The dominant view in most newspapers and journals was that the Holocaust did not directly relate to 'us', in other words, to ethnic Poles. That is why the subject was written about less frequently and with greater emotional distance, which sprang from an attitude of 'neutrality' towards a war being waged by the occupying forces against 'alien' Polish Jews."[117] Despite the shared experiences of Polish and Jewish concentration camp prisoners, this attitude also applied to members of the PZbWP. Articles written by Jews or about Jews appeared only sporadically in *Wolni Ludzie*. The magazine's principal focus was the fate of Poles. Perhaps this also reflected relations within the camps, where each category of prisoner lived in separate barracks, was often assigned to different work commandos, and thus to a large extent lived in isolation from other categories of prisoner.

The way in which Polish political prisoners perceived Auschwitz is well illustrated by a memo sent in the autumn of 1945 to President Bierut requesting that the Polish authorities take over the site of the former camp. The authors justified their appeal on the grounds that "it was a camp where millions of Poles died; a camp which became, within a few years, a symbol of the destruction to which Hitler had condemned Poland; a symbol of terror and suffering; a symbol of the dedication and sacrifice of those who had fought for Poland".[118] Such a view of the history and importance of Auschwitz-Birkenau was also reflected in the commentaries on the Höss trial published in *Wolni Ludzie*. Whereas the Jewish press emphasised that "Auschwitz is one of the darkest episodes in the martyrdom of the Jewish nation" and a symbol of its "suffering under Nazism"[119], the PZbWP's magazine made scant reference to the extermination of Jews at Auschwitz. The Zionist weekly *Nasze Słowo*, for instance, true to the original wording of the indictment, reported that the Commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau had been accused of the murder of: "a) approximately 300,000 people incarcerated in the camp as prisoners, b) approximately four million people, mainly Jews, brought to the camp in transports from various countries for the purpose of extermination, and c) approximately 12,000 Soviet prisoners of war"[120], while *Wolni Ludzie* merely stated that Höss had been accused of gassing four million people.[121]

It would be wrong to claim that the Holocaust was never mentioned in the commentaries on the Nazi war trials that appeared in *Wolni Ludzie*. When reporting on the trial of Auschwitz staff, for instance, *Wolni Ludzie* stated that "half a

117 Friedrich, *Der nationalsozialistische Judenmord in polnischen Augen*, p. 687.

118 Memorandum of former prisoners of the Auschwitz Camp regarding the safeguarding of the site, 13 Nov. 1945, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Fa–szyzmem 19B.

119 "Oświęcim—obóz zagłady", *Nasze Słowo*, 18 Mar. 1947.

120 Ibid.

121 "Kat Oświęcimia Hoess w Warszawie", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Mar. 1947.

million Hungarian Jews had been gassed" at Auschwitz, that the purpose of "Operation Reinhard" had been to "murder the Jewish population and appropriate their property", and that members of the Auschwitz SS had been accused of "participating in the mass transportation of Jews for the purpose of their extermination in the gas chambers".[122] However, this information was not put into context; it failed to capture the relative losses suffered by each national group and gave no indication as to the unique fate of the Jewish population. Besides offering examples of the martyrdom of Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and other victims, the sole purpose of this information was to illustrate the criminal nature of the Nazi regime.

Yet the line adopted by the editorial board of *Wolni Ludzie* was not consistent. On occasion, the magazine published articles which referred to the Holocaust less obliquely. It would seem that members of the PZbWP were motivated not so much by a desire to relativize or deny the extermination of the Jewish nation as by a total indifference towards the fate of those whom they did not consider to be "their own". The Jewish experience was beyond the bounds of their imagination. This is well illustrated by an article written for *Wolni Ludzie* by Ewa Śliwińska, deputy director of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom at the Ministry of Art and Culture, to mark the official opening of the Auschwitz Museum. Śliwińska wrote that the date of the opening—14 June 1947—coincided with the seventh anniversary of the first transport of Polish political prisoners to Auschwitz. Despite this, Śliwińska asked rhetorically, "should the opening of the State Museum at Auschwitz be connected with a particular anniversary—one of many anniversaries still observed by Polish society? Is the commemoration of this anniversary really justified?" If anyone was in any doubt about this, she replied, they ought to look at Auschwitz from the perspective of the future *Aufnahmegebäude*.[123] For that place is "not just connected with the personal experiences of those who suffered at Auschwitz; as a vision of the future, it must also disturb the imagination and thinking of all Poles":

> Every Pole, literally every Pole, could have ended up in the *Aufnahmegebäude*, and there would have been space for us all. […] Today, we have at our disposal documents which prove that the next stage after the extermination of the Jews was to be the extermination of the Poles […]. That is why, for all Poles, the vision of this temple of death is at once a vision of the future of the entire Polish nation; it remains a terrible reminder to us all. And that is why all Poles, when questioning the significance of 14 June 1940, which began the first chapter in the Auschwitz drama, will agree that this

122 "Przed rozprawą Oświęcimską", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Nov. 1947; "Polska karze katów Oświęcimia", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Dec. 1947.

123 The camp reception building. This building was not completed until late summer 1944, and it is probable that only one transport of prisoners ever passed through it—Polish civilians from the Warsaw Uprising (*Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. I, p. 60).

> tragic anniversary should unite us in pondering our unfulfilled fate—extermination, and our fulfilled fate—national salvation. The day of 14 June deserves a moment of solemn and collective contemplation."[124]

What is striking is that the author, whilst recognising that Auschwitz was a venue for the extermination of Polish and European Jews, did not see this as sufficient reason for organising a commemorative event involving the entire nation. For Śliwińska, the fate of the Jews was not important; it was meaningful only in so far as it forewarned what might have happened to the Poles. In her eyes, Auschwitz was not so much a place where Jews were exterminated as a place where the Polish nation was miraculously saved.

While the grounds of the judgement in the Höss trial presented a fairly accurate picture of the losses suffered by each nation, the judgement in the trial of the Auschwitz staff, delivered barely eight months later, blurred the identity of the victims. This change is all the more striking as certain fragments of the judgement in the trial of Auschwitz staff were simply copied from the judgement in the Höss trial, only with certain paragraphs and sentences omitted. Although it was maintained that amongst non-registered prisoners "the largest proportion were Jews from all the nations occupied by Germany and her allies", followed by "Russians, both civilians and POWs, Poles, particularly from the Zamość and Lublin regions, and also Gypsies", what the judgement failed to add was that, in contrast to the Jewish transports, "Aryan" transports were only occasionally sent directly to the gas chambers. Even greater falsification was rendered by a passage which listed the identities of the 400,000 prisoners registered in the camp. It was claimed that this number included "members of 21 nations, in particular, Poles, Czechs, Russians, Yugoslavs, French, Belgians, Dutch, Norwegians, Greeks, Romanians, Jews, and Gypsies. Amongst these prisoners, the majority were Poles."[125] Omitted was a detail which had been included in the judgement delivered in the Höss trial, namely, that the figure for Polish citizens included both Poles and Jews, and that Jews were also in the majority amongst prisoners from other countries.[126]

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124 Ewa Śliwińska, "Perspektywa i uroczystość", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947.

125 "Sentencja wyroku w procesie przeciwko członkom załogi oświęcimskiej" (22 Dec. 1947) in *Siedem procesów przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, p. 183.

126 One source of the confusion was the lack of clarity as to the number of victims of Auschwitz. According to the findings of the Soviet Commission for the Investigation of Crimes in Auschwitz, the camp was to have claimed some four million human lives ("Miejsce kaźni czterech milionów ludzi. Wyniki nadzwyczajnej komisji do badań zbrodni niemieckich w Oświęcimiu", *Życie Warszawy*, 9 May 1945). As a witness in the Nuremberg Trials, Rudolf Höss testified that in all, around three million people perished in Auschwitz, 2.5 million of them by gassing and 0.5 million due to exhaustion. During his trial before the Supreme National Tribunal (NTN), the accused revised this figure, claiming that no more than around 1.1 million people could have died in the camp. These data are similar

Furthermore, the court divided the history of the camp into two periods—before and after October 1942. Such a division was not in itself controversial and could be found in many other contemporaneous publications. The general view was that, in the initial period, Auschwitz was mainly used to incarcerate Polish political prisoners, while in the latter period it became a venue for the mass extermination of Jews. During that second period, as stated, for instance, in the 1947 plan for the Auschwitz Museum, "life in the camp itself was easier, although there were millions of victims—eight times more than during the initial period".[127] What is shocking, therefore, is that the judgement in the trial of Auschwitz staff merely stated that the period after October 1942 was significantly better for the prisoners:

> During the initial period, a prisoner could receive no help from outside the camp and was certain to die within a few weeks unless he was assigned a function that ensured a more bearable existence. [...] During the second period, however, the economic purpose of the camps became paramount: prisoners were subjected to slave labour in order to increase the military capacity of the Third Reich. [...] Although, throughout this period, prisoners eventually perished, they did so only after their labour had been fully exploited [...]. Despite these changes, the Nazis never abandoned their plan to exterminate the Slavs and the remaining Jews as well as other inconvenient groups and individuals. This is evidenced by the planned construction of Crematorium No. VI in Birkenau [...].[128]

In this context, no mention was made of the fact that it was precisely in the years 1943-1944 that the mass extermination of Jews at Birkenau took place.

It is not certain what caused the shift in tone between the two judgements, especially as the same judges presided over both trials. One may assume that the change

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to the estimates given by the expert witness Nachman Blumental, who claimed that the number of Jews murdered in Auschwitz could have been around 1.5 million. Ultimately, the NTN found Höss guilty of the deaths of at least 2.8 million people, including around 300,000 incarcerated in the camp as prisoners and at least 2.5 million "largely Jews taken to Auschwitz in transports from various countries in Europe for the purpose of immediate extermination"; the figure of 3-4 million victims was given as having "all the attributes of possibility". In spite of this, in Poland, it was the old, inflated figure of four million murdered that took root. While authors such as Filip Friedman and Jan Sehn articulated clearly that, irrespective of the actual number of Auschwitz victims, the vast majority of them must have been Jews, in later periods this inflated figure often led to distortions regarding the identities of the victims. On this subject see: Piper, *Ilu ludzi zginęło w KL Auschwitz*, pp. 30-60; idem, "Weryfikacja strat osobowych w obozie koncentracyjnym w Oświęcimiu"; Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, pp. 148-156.

127 Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp at Auschwitz, no date (probably spring-summer 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13. Cf. also: "Oświęcim w krwi i walce".

128 "Sentencja wyroku w procesie przeciwko członkom załogi oświęcimskiej" in *Siedem procesów przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, pp. 191-192.

was caused by political pressure and that the trial of Auschwitz staff was affected by the intensification of the Cold War. This is evidenced, *inter alia*, by a statement made by Stefan Kurowski, one of the prosecutors working for the Supreme National Tribunal (NTN), which was quoted in *Wolni Ludzie*. The magazine reported that the trial of Arthur Liebehenschel and others would be different from the Höss trial because the new political situation meant that the public prosecutors would want to reveal the criminality not so much of the individuals concerned as of the entire fascist system. During the Höss trial, Kurowski is quoted as saying, "the primary focus was on the individual, [...] on the violation of human dignity".[129] Such an approach proved to be insufficient, however, "since increasingly confident pro-fascist groups have begun a campaign which aims to show that the crimes of the concentration camps were solely the result of individual excesses". Consequently, during the trial of Auschwitz staff, the aim was to present evidence "that demonstrated the link between the concentration camps and overall Nazi policy" and to show that "the camps were a vehicle for a policy whose purpose was the total extermination of peoples subjugated by the Third Reich, primarily the Slavs and Jews". The atmosphere surrounding the trial is also illustrated by the fact that even the Jewish *Nasze Słowo* argued that, given a situation in which "the imperialists", "alarmed by the victory of the people's democracies", were once again readying themselves for war and beginning to support "neo-fascist elements", the trial would be hugely important in propaganda terms.[130] The author of a commentary entitled "The Cracovian Nuremberg", which appeared in *Wolni Ludzie* after the proceedings had ended, wrote that it had been "not only a criminal, but also a political" trial. "The trial throws light on the dark soul of a nation which, on the basis of a criminal ideology, nurtured crimes that are beyond human comprehension. [...] We know the Germans! We know them better than those on whose lands Prussian soldiers have never set foot. And that is why we demand that our truth be told, so that it may reach the cosy offices where the spirit of Munich still reigns."[131] No doubt, such an approach also helped to blur the Jewish dimension of Auschwitz martyrology in the grounds of the judgement, for what it wanted to prove was that fascism was the enemy not only of the Jews but of humanity as a whole, in particular the peoples of the Soviet Union and other allied Slavic nations. In the rhetoric of the Cold War, there was no place for commemorating the Holocaust as a crime of genocide specifically aimed at European Jews.

The grounds of the judgement in the trial of Auschwitz staff were only a foretaste of the changes that were being planned. In this matter, the Polish authorities had no reason to fear resistance from former Polish political prisoners; on the contrary, as far as the manner of presenting the martyrdom of Jews was concerned,

129 "Polska karze katów Oświęcimia", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Dec. 1947.

130 "Na posterunku. 40 z Oświęcimia", *Nasze Słowo*, 1 Dec. 1947.

131 Mieczysław Kieta, "Krakowska Norymberga", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jan. 1948.

the policy of the PPR/PZPR and the attitude of members of the PZbWP were very similar. One example of such convergence of opinion was a speech written in 1949 by Tadeusz Hołuj to mark the opening of a touring exhibition entitled "Extermination or Peace?". Hołuj, a former Auschwitz inmate, argued that those who believed that the Germans were solely enemies of the Jews, and not of humanity as a whole, were mistaken. It was enough to look at the fate of the Poles, which "may serve as an excellent illustration of what awaited other nations. To all those remaining sceptics and doubters in thrall to the ideals of 'Western culture', of which the Germans, let us not forget, were also part, and to all those who claim that it was only the Jews who were to be exterminated, that the whole problem of genocide does not relate to the Poles because they would somehow have come to terms with the 'New Order', and that it was thus only a Jewish matter—we must say: Wrong! Wrong, because every form of imperialist aggression under the banner of anti-communism, racial supremacy, and a belief in pure violence, will necessarily lead to genocide. Wrong, because the failure to wipe us out was neither the achievement nor the intention of Nazi Germany; it was merely the outcome of the situation in which Germany found itself—a country stripped of its workforce—and of the political and military situation dictated by the victory of the Allied armies, with the Red Army at the fore."[132]

"Heroes of the Ghetto" or Passive Victims?

The transformation of the PZbWP from an association of victims into a veterans' organisation largely prevented Jews from joining the association. From today's perspective this may seem obvious, since we have become accustomed to perceiving Holocaust victims primarily as defenceless civilians. However, the glorification of World War II victims did not necessarily need to entail the exclusion of those persecuted by the Nazis on racial grounds. As Pieter Lagrou writes, in France, left-wing veterans' organisations admitted Jews as well, classifying them as heroes of the anti-fascist resistance movement on a par with political prisoners and other members of the *Résistance*. Moreover, as Lagrou states, most Holocaust survivors readily accepted this classification, since the new anti-fascist version of patriotism propagated by the left, which blurred the details of survivors' experiences, also lent meaning to those experiences.[133]

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132 Paper by Tadeusz Hołuj for delivery as part of the touring exhibition "Zagłada czy pokój?", 1949, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 72.

133 Lagrou writes: "There may have been an ideological hegemony assimilating various experiences to the holistic martyrdom, but this was at the same time what many of the Jewish victims who actively adhered to the anti-fascist paradigm needed at the moment. Antifas-

Lagrou's hypothesis finds partial confirmation in the case of Poland, as is evidenced by the discussions which took place amongst the Jewish community in the second half of the 1940s on the definition of heroism and on conduct during the occupation. What is striking is how much space was devoted at that time to the Jewish contribution in the fight against Nazism. As August Grabski writes, a major role in the creation of this heroic narrative was played by Jewish veterans' organisations, above all the Union of Jewish Partisans (ZPŻ), created in the autumn of 1944, and the Union of Jewish Participants in the Armed Struggle against Fascism (ZŻUWZzF), created in the spring of 1947.[134] One of the main tasks of both organisations was to document "the history of the struggle of the Jewish masses against the occupying forces".[135] As Hersz Smolar, chairman of the ZŻUWZzF, said at the organisation's congress in March 1947 in Wrocław: "By recording the memory of our battles on the front, in the forests, and on the barricades of the ghettos, our military exploits and heroism, we shall uncover the true face of this most tragic period of our history; we shall help to nurture within our ranks a tradition of struggle for the honour and freedom of our nation and of unprecedented heroism in that struggle."[136] Some Jewish members of the PZbWP made speeches in a similar tone. In the dispute over whether to send a separate CKŻP delegation to the first international congress of former political prisoners, which took place in Warsaw at the beginning of 1946, one Jewish former prisoner argued that Jews had not only suffered the greatest losses during the war but had also made "a colossal contribution to the struggle against fascism".[137] No one knew more than their concentration camp comrades, he said, "about the contribution Jews made to clandestine activity in the camps" and about how few of them had managed to survive.

This heroic tone, however, could be detected not only in the statements of association activists; the armed and civilian resistance movements were also the subject of numerous CŻKH publications[138], and the Jewish press paid much at-

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cism as a 'universalizing' device offered a generous and heroic interpretation. For individuals who had barely survived inconceivable suffering, the identification with antifascism was a means of overcoming the appallingly arbitrary affliction that had hit them, a way to take possession of their own destiny, a retrospective revenge on the inhuman enemy." (*The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, p. 260). Cf. also: Bachmann, *Długi cień Trzeciej Rzeszy*, p. 112.

134 Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki*, passim.

135 From the speech made by Hersz Smolar at the ZŻUWZzF provincial congress on 10 March 1947 in Wrocław. Quoted after: Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki*, p. 82.

136 Ibid.

137 Report of the Jewish delegation to the FIAPP Congress on 3-6 Feb. 1946, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/35.

138 See, inter alia: *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach*; Michał M. Borwicz, *Uniwersytet zbirów*, Kraków 1946; Gusta Dawidsohn-Draengerowa, *Pamiętnik Justyny*, Kraków 1946; Józef Kermisz, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim*, Łódź 1946.

tention to the subject. The main symbol in the history of the Jewish resistance movement was the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April-May 1943. Yet there were also many texts devoted to the armed revolts and clandestine activities in other ghettos and camps. Authors wrote about the revolts in Treblinka, Sobibór, and Auschwitz, armed resistance in the Białystok ghetto, Częstochowa, and Będzin, clandestine activities in the Łódź and Kraków ghettos, and the Jewish partisans. The participation of Jews in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 was often mentioned. Zionist journals also published many articles—usually reprinted from the Palestinian press—which remembered the Jews who had fought on the "fronts of the Second World War", including Jewish soldiers in the ranks of the British Army and Jewish paratroopers dropped over Hungary and Yugoslavia.

The manner in which Polish Jews presented their own history should not be surprising. Just as their Polish counterparts, they wanted to reproduce a traditional hierarchy of values, according to which only those who had not given up their life without a fight were worthy of their successors' remembrance and respect. Such thinking found expression in an essay by Rachela Auerbach published in the spring of 1948 in *Nasze Słowo*. The author recounted the story of a Treblinka prisoner who had escaped from the camp only to perish in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Thanks to this, wrote Auerbach, his death acquired "a profound, tragic meaning". "It is as if he returned from Treblinka in order to change the manner of his death, to die with dignity."[139] Auerbach thus juxtaposed the "debased" death of the defenceless victims of the extermination camps with the heroic death of the participants of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In other accounts, too, the defence of personal honour and the honour of the entire Jewish nation was portrayed as the main reason for rebellion. For many Polish–Jewish authors, such an approach was obvious; for some, however, highlighting Jewish wartime heroism also presented an opportunity to "smash down the wall" that separated them from society at large.[140] A speech marking the second anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising read: "The Jewish masses have shown the Polish nation and the whole world that they are able to fight, weapon in hand, in defence of their human and national dignity, that they are able to die like heroes. The heroic struggle of the Polish Jews will enter the history of the fight against fascism, the history of liberation struggles in Poland."[141] Moreover, for Zionists in Poland and in Palestine, Jewish sacrifice in the struggle against fascism bolstered the argument for the creation of Israel.

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139 Rachela Auerbach, "Dlaczego tak późno?", *Nasze Słowo*, 19 Apr. 1947.

140 Cf. The speech by Hersz Smolar at the ZŻUWZzF provincial congress on 10 March 1947 in Wrocław. Cited after: Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce*, p. 82.

141 Points to be made in an article and speech entitled: "II rocznica powstania w getcie warszawskim", no date. Quoted after: Grabski, *Żydowski ruch kombatancki w Polsce*, p. 196.

However, in constructing this heroic narrative, Jewish authors encountered numerous obstacles. When trying to find examples to illustrate Jewish heroism, they often came to the conclusion that the resistance shown by those condemned to extermination had been very weak and, due to the small number of survivors, was very difficult to document. To repel accusations made by *Yishuv* and Poles alike about the passivity and cowardice of the Jewish diaspora, Jewish authors pointed to the context of wartime persecution. Of relevance here is Michał Borwicz's introduction to a volume entitled *The Underground Movement in the Ghettos and Camps. Materials and Documents*, compiled and edited by Betti Ajzensztajn. Rather than glorifying the achievements of the Jewish underground, Borwicz, himself a participant in the resistance movement and a member of the ZŻUWZzF, tried instead to explain its weakness. Among the factors which made individual or collective acts of resistance difficult, Borwicz listed the following: the breakup of former communities through displacement to ghettos and camps; the isolation of various groups; lack of space; poverty; lack of technical resources; hunger; epidemics; physical exhaustion; the constantly changing situation; and the unpredictability of the occupying forces. He also mentioned the separateness and hostility of the non-Jewish environment, which paralysed all attempts at organising resistance or seeking help. "Many non-Jews came to the assistance of persecuted Jews, and in doing so displayed not only generosity but often also perseverance and heroism," wrote Borwicz. "Due to the nature of the situation, however, such help could only be given in the utmost secrecy. By contrast, the rabble operated casually and openly. It was thus very difficult for a Jew to reach a friend, even if one existed, while scoundrels would hunt down Jews of their own accord. The need for people of good will to suppress their feelings and conceal their actions from the non-Jewish population, combined with the fact that the dregs of society (both the common and […] the 'ideological') could act so brazenly, meant that the ghettos were surrounded by a ring of hostility."[142]Borwicz also pointed to the fact that other groups of victims who found themselves in a situation even approaching that of the Jews—forced labourers or concentration camp inmates, for instance—were no more brave or enterprising. "Did the civilian population, regularly 'pacified' by squads of German thugs, defend itself?" he asked rhetorically. "The opportunities were certainly greater than in the ghettos and camps, yet there was no active resistance. [...] People from 'pacified' districts often took part in guerrilla activities and did so with great courage. Armed clandestine groups often responded to 'pacification' with planned raids. Yet those same people, so long as they remained in a civilian environment together with their families, were defenceless."[143] It was no different in the camps. "As any former prisoner or any

142 Borwicz, Foreword to *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach*, p. XV.
143 Ibid., p. XI.

reader of the now numerous concentration camp memoirs knows," wrote Borwicz, "the hopelessness of the situation did not give rise to desperate rebellion but, at most, to quiet resignation."[144] This attitude does not indicate that "the oppressed lacked a spirit of resistance, but simply that an army which is morally bankrupt and armed to the teeth is often stronger than a defenceless civilian population. [...] A person caught in the clutches of the Nazi machine was usually defenceless. Yet what if a community had no reserves to draw upon outside the structures of repression. What if the occupier's talons had swept up that community wholly and completely?"[145] Similar arguments were used by Rachela Auerbach. In the aforementioned essay, whilst lamenting the weakness of the Jewish underground, she nevertheless rejected the accusations made by Polish society. "Why did the Jews 'give up'? We would have never given up…"—Auerbach thus paraphrased the claim made by some Poles. "God willing, the time for comparison will never come, but if it does, let us hope that the Polish masses, perhaps making good use of Jewish experience, will be better able to cope."[146]

Already at that time, the first attempts were being made to redefine the traditional notion of heroism. Sometimes, Borwicz argued, passive resistance required greater courage and tenacity and did more damage to the occupying forces than hand-to-hand combat. Ajzensztajn, too, suggested that in the wartime context it was wrong to equate resistance solely with combat. Equally important were expressions of solidarity, mutual help, attempts to preserve traditions and identity, and even the saving of one's own life. "Like all concepts, heroism is a relative term," she wrote. "For people who, despite the war, carried on as usual, the acts which we regard as heroic might appear comical and insignificant, yet those who survived the ordeal of occupation know how much courage was required merely to stray from the well-trodden path of passivity or to commit a transgression."[147] Heroic acts included escaping from a ghetto or camp, arranging "Aryan papers" and living on the "Aryan" side, clandestine teaching, contributing to cultural, religious and academic life, self-help, documenting Nazi crimes, and saving cultural artefacts. Showing solidarity in death, which Janusz Korczak and many others had the courage to do, was also an expression of heroism.

Borwicz went one step further. He tried not only to reformulate the notion of heroism but to deconstruct it completely. The damage, he noted, that the resistance movement could do to the occupying forces was disproportionately small compared to the retribution that would follow. "Demonstrations, even those for which the highest price must be paid, serve future history," he wrote. "But what

144 Ibid., p. XII.
145 Ibid., p. IX.
146 Rachela Auerbach, "Dlaczego tak późno?", *Nasze Słowo*, 19 Apr. 1947.
147 Ajzensztajn, "Tło" in *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach*, p. 25.

if the price is the total eradication of that future history through the biological annihilation of an entire nation?"[148] Borwicz expressed these doubts even more forcibly through one of the heroes of his fictionalised account of the camp on Janowska Street in Lwów. During a discussion on the preparations for a revolt, one of the prisoners was to have said:

> You're talking rubbish […] as if you were writing a silly story about the camps without ever having seen one in reality. [...] Each one of us […] has been up against the wall and knows what it's like. We should have tried to defend ourselves—indeed! When a prisoner in the Czwartaki camp killed an SS officer, besides the massacre within the camp, several dozen Jews were hanged from the balconies of the Judenrat [Jewish council building]—if you'll pardon the expression. Never mind, if you have to die for such a "demonstration", then so be it. But what did it achieve? Not a single soul gave that prisoner a moment's thought. [...] When you're going to your death, hands bare, surrounded by dozens of machine guns, the only thing left to you is precisely to do nothing. It's the hardest thing—to go quietly, lips shut. I'll never forgive your "world" for managing to slander the victims even for their supreme concentration at the moment of death. It's the blood-stained silence of thousands of women… When you can do nothing to stop a crime, you should at least know how to remain silent. Three-quarters of the tortured manage it. That is also dignity. It's rotten dignity, but dignity all the same….[149]

Other Groups of Victims

The importance of the existence of relatively autonomous Jewish organisations able to "lobby" for their own interpretation of the past is underscored by the situation of other victims of the Nazi terror, such as Roma, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, who had no such means of exerting influence. Their fate was almost completely forgotten.

The extermination of the Roma was mentioned only in certain judgements of the Supreme National Tribunal (NTN) and certain publications of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP).[150] The information was usually perfunctory, however, and explained neither where

148 Borwicz, Foreword to *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach*, p. X.

149 Borwicz, *Uniwersytet zbirów*, pp. 65-67.

150 See, inter alia: "Sentencja wyroku w sprawie Rudolfa Hössa" in *Siedem procesów przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*; "Sentencja wyroku w procesie przeciwko członkom załogi oświęcimskiej" in ibid.; "Obozy zagłady, obozy koncentracyjne i obozy pracy na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939-1945"; "Zagłada Żydów polskich w latach 1939-1945"; "Obóz zagłady Chełmno"; "Obóz zagłady w Sobiborze"; "Obóz koncentracyjny Stutthof"; "Obóz zagłady Oświęcim".

the deportees had come from nor their earlier fortunes. In his study on Auschwitz-Birkenau, Jan Sehn described in detail the fate of Poles, Jews, and Soviet prisoners of war, but only twice, and only in passing, mentioned the Roma who had been incarcerated in the camp.[151] The study ignored the history of the Gypsy Family Camp and failed to mention that almost all Roma inmates were exterminated in the gas chambers of Birkenau. *Wolni Ludzie* likewise alluded the fate of the Roma on only a few occasions.[152] In the 1940s, Jerzy Ficowski was one of very few authors interested in the martyrology of the Roma during the Second World War. In June 1949, he published an announcement in *Wolni Ludzie* in which he asked readers to send in materials and information about the extermination of the Roma in the years 1939-1945, since he planned to write a piece on the subject.[153]

Although, when writing about the camps, authors frequently spoke of the Nazis' plans to exterminate the Slavs, in this context Ukrainians and Belarusians were rarely mentioned; only in very few statements and publications did they figure as separate groups of victims. One exception was the appeal of Polish political prisoners "To Comrades from the Concentration Camps", published in the first issue of *Wolni Ludzie* in March 1947, in which Ukrainians and Belarusians were listed alongside other "friendly peoples of the USSR".[154] In the main, however, when authors wrote about other Slavic nations, it was usually Czechs, Yugoslavs, and Soviet prisoners of war who were mentioned. The last of these groups was usually seen as synonymous with Russians. In the report on the GKBZNwP's investigation into Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sehn uses the terms "Soviet prisoners of war", "Russian prisoners of war", and "Russians", interchangeably.[155] A similar approach was taken in the case of civilian victims. Thus, for instance, the judgement in the trial of Auschwitz staff stated that between 2.5 and 4 million people had been murdered at Auschwitz, of whom the greatest proportion were Jews from Poland and other European countries, followed by "Russians, both civilians and POWs, Poles [...], and also Gypsies".[156] Other texts simply referred to Soviet prisoners of war or to citizens of the USSR, without stating the nationality of the people concerned.

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151 "Obóz zagłady Oświęcim", pp. 78, 83.

152 See, inter alia: Krystyna Walska, "Jak królowa cygańska tańczyła w Oświęcimiu", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Sep. 1947.

153 Jerzy Ficowski, "Ogłoszenie z prośbą o nadsyłanie materiałów dot. zagłady Cyganów 1939-1945", *Wolni Ludzie*, 7-15 Jun. 1949. On the subject of the extermination of the Gypsies in Poland, see also: Mróz, "Niepamięć nie jest zapomnieniem. Cyganie-Romowie a Holokaust", *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, Vol. 49, 2 (2000).

154 "Do Towarzyszy z obozów koncentracyjnych".

155 "Obóz zagłady Oświęcim", pp. 92-94.

156 "Sentencja wyroku w procesie przeciwko członkom załogi oświęcimskiej" in *Siedem procesów przed Najwyższym Trybunałem Narodowym*, p. 184.

This categorisation was adopted primarily for reasons of domestic and international policy. The emphasis placed on the heroism of Russians and their sacrifice in the struggle against fascism was a carbon copy of Soviet propaganda. Furthermore, to list Belarusians and Ukrainians among concentration camp victims might have raised uncomfortable questions about their citizenship prior to 1939, evoking memories of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. That this issue remains a subject of controversy between Moscow and Warsaw is evidenced by the dispute that arose over a new Russian exhibition in the State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was reported the press in the spring of 2007.[157] The point of contention was precisely the fact that the authors of the exhibition had included amongst the USSR's war losses the inhabitants of Polish territories occupied by the Soviet Army in September 1939.[158]

Already in the 1940s there emerged the stereotype that Red Army soldiers imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps were Russians, while the members of auxiliary SS units—largely recruited from amongst Soviet prisoners of war—who became concentration camp and death camp staff, were Ukrainians[159]; this stereotype still functions to this day. There are several factors that helped to consolidate this categorisation. The experience of the war years meant that many Poles, particularly refugees and displaced persons from the Eastern Borderlands (*Kresy*) of the Second Polish Republic, saw Ukrainians as oppressors and not as victims of the German occupation.[160] What this view ignored was the complex relationship that existed between Germans and Ukrainians during the Second World War and the fact that many Ukrainians, including Ukrainian nationalists, had been

157 See, inter alia: "Nowy skandal w relacjach polsko-rosyjskich?", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 Jun. 2007, published online: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,74655,4034452.html (3 Apr. 2007); "Rosyjski MSZ protestuje przeciwko zamknięciu wystawy", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 Jun. 2007, published online: http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/swiat/1,34248,4036030.html (3 Apr. 2007); "Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau: Polska nie zamknęła wystawy rosyjskiej", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15 Jun. 2007, published online: http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,53600,4035307.html (3 Apr. 2007).

158 In January 2010 a temporary Russian exhibition was opened in the State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau devoted to the liberation of the camp. It is to form part of a future permanent Russian national exhibition. The display was prepared by the Museum of the Great Patriotic War, commissioned by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation. Published online: http://pl.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1135&Itemid=10 (27 Jan. 2010)

159 Peter Black, "Prosty żołnierz akcji 'Reinhardt'. Oddział z Trawnik i eksterminacja polskich Żydów" in *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*.

160 On the subject of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict during the war and in the immediate postwar period see, inter alia: Grzegorz Motyka, *Tak było w Bieszczadach. Walki polsko-ukraińskie 1943-1948*, Warszawa 1999.

persecuted by the Nazis and sent to concentration camps. In light of the ongoing battles between the Polish Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the years 1945-1947, the forced expulsions of the Ukrainian population to the USSR in 1944-1946, and Operation Vistula in 1947, during which approximately 140,000 Polish Ukrainians and Lemkos were resettled from south-eastern Poland to northern and western regions of the country, the Communist authorities were also keen to maintain the image of Ukrainians as enemies of the Polish nation and collaborators of the Third Reich. In these circumstances, there was all the more reason for Soviet prisoners of war to be seen as "Russians".

Chapter 3
At the "Limit of a Certain Morality"[1]: Polish Debates on the Conduct of Concentration Camp Prisoners

> ...and finally, tell us how you wangled places in the infirmary and in good work commandos, how you shoved the "Muselmänner"[2] into the ovens, and how you bought men and women. Tell us what you did in the *Unterkünfte* (barracks), in Kanada[3], in the *Krankenbau* (camp hospital), and in the Gypsy camp. Tell us about that and all the minor things. Tell us about daily life in the camp and how it was organised. Tell us about the hierarchy of fear and the loneliness of each individual. But admit that it was you who did these things, that you, too, deserve a piece of Auschwitz's grim reputation! Wouldn't you agree?[4]

It was with this appeal to his former camp comrades that Tadeusz Borowski ended his review of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's Auschwitz memoir. The cited article appeared in *Pokolenie* [Generation] in January 1947. Borowski accused the author of *From the Abyss* of unfairly juxtaposing the loyal and dignified conduct of Polish women prisoners with the supposed lack of solidarity and fortitude displayed by women of other nationalities and of ignoring facts that could have put her Birkenau comrades in a bad light. According to Borowski, by attributing the heroic conduct of Polish women in Birkenau to their patriotism and deeply-rooted Catholic faith, Kossak-Szczucka had disregarded the different living conditions faced by each category of prisoner, which determined their chances of survival and whether they were in a position to help others.

Borowski himself, in his Auschwitz stories published in the years 1946-1948, describes in an uncompromising manner the entanglement of prisoners

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1 Text of a letter by Tadeusz Borowski to Paweł Jasienica. Quoted after: Paweł Jasienica, "Spowiedź udręczonych", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5. Oct. 1947.

2 A term used in the camps to describe mentally and physically exhausted individuals who willingly succumbed to death.

3 Warehouses in Birkenau where the property of murdered inmates was sorted and stored. In camp jargon, the warehouses were referred to as "Kanada" (Canada) on account of the "riches" to be found there.

4 Tadeusz Borowski, *Alicja w krainie czarów* in idem, *Utwory wybrane*, compiled by Andrzej Werner, Wrocław 1991, p. 497.

in the system of terror and their indifference towards the suffering of their comrades. For Borowski, there is no clear distinction between perpetrators and victims.[5] The essence of Auschwitz is that it debases all who come into contact with it; the SS officer and the *Häftling* (inmate) both become cogs in a criminal machine. In the camp, every action intended to increase one's own chances of survival or improve living conditions is taken at the expense of another human being. Prisoners working in "Kanada" profit from the human transports sent to the gas chambers; *Vorarbeiter* (foreman) Tadek without hesitation transmits an SS order to murder two Jewish inmates; the cooks sell prisoners' food rations in return for vodka and cigarettes. "The phrase 'I survived Auschwitz'," writes Andrzej Werner, "has a completely different meaning for the author of *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* than it does for the authors of martyrdom literature; the martyr's glory, the victim's values, simply vanish into the ether; all that remains is a terrible feeling—if not of guilt, then of shame…."[6]

Werner is right to claim that, from the outset, Polish post-war fiction was dominated by the "martyrological" trend in camp literature and that Tadeusz Borowski was one of very few Polish novelists to oppose that trend. What is questionable, however, is that Werner offers on this basis a general analysis of Polish memory of the Second World War. Interpreting the experience of the camps in terms of martyrdom and heroism certainly fulfilled a broad social need and conformed to the Polish Romantic tradition, which saw the Poles as the "Christ of nations"; with certain modifications it also suited the policy of Poland's Communist rulers, for whom the myth of the international anti-fascist resistance movement, ostensibly led by party comrades, was an important source of legitimacy. In the 1940s, however, memory of the war and occupation was still too raw and too detailed for it to be possible to erase all the cracks and contradictions and replace them with a simple black-and-white narrative. In addition, the new Communist authorities were not yet established well enough that they could impose their own interpretation of history.

The controversy over Borowski's prose was set against the background of the trials of prisoner functionaries (*Kapos*) and the public debate which accompanied them. This debate was particularly heated among the ex-prisoner community, which was directly affected by the trials. "Whenever former Auschwitz inmates meet," wrote Jerzy Rawicz in the periodical *Robotnik* [The Worker], "the subject always comes to the fore. They all know someone deserving of punishment and public

5 On the subject of the oeuvre of Tadeusz Borowski see, above all: Andrzej Werner, *Zwyczajna apokalipsa. Tadeusz Borowski i jego wizja świata obozów*, Warszawa 1971. See also: Sławomir Buryła, Foreword to Tadeusz Borowski, *Pisma (Proza I)*, Sławomir Buryła (ed.), Kraków 2004, pp. 6-19.

6 Werner, *Zwyczajna apokalipsa*, p. 150.

condemnation."[7] Although the moral judgements made by the participants in the debate were not always as categorical as Borowski's, their descriptions of the conflicts between prisoners and the ambivalent conduct of many prisoner functionaries are far removed from the image of camp life portrayed in Polish memoirs and fiction.

War Crimes Trials in Poland, 1944-1950

The second half of the 1940s was a period in which Polish society was coming to terms with the war and occupation.[8] In the years 1944-1950, numerous trials of German and Austrian war criminals took place before the Polish courts. The most famous of these were the trials of the Majdanek SS (November–December 1944); Arthur Greiser, Gauleiter of Wartheland (June–July 1946); Amon Goeth, Commandant of Płaszów (August–September 1946); Rudolf Höss, Commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau (March 1947); Auschwitz staff (November–December 1947); Albert Forster, Gauleiter of Danzig-West Prussia (April 1948); and Josef Bühler, State Secretary of the General Government (June–July 1948). Many Polish citizens accused of having been informers or of collaborating with the Nazis in other ways were also tried by the courts. For political reasons, the trials of war criminals did not include those suspected of collaboration with the Soviet authorities.

According to Leszek Kubicki's findings, in the years 1944-1960 approximately 18,000 people were tried in Poland for war crimes or collaboration.[9] Most of the trials took place in the 1940s and early 1950s. Whereas in 1944-1951 almost 16,000 people were sentenced under the August Decree, over the subsequent nine years, until 1960, just over 2,000 judgements were delivered. Three-quarters of the 18,000 accused were Polish citizens, ethnic Poles, or foreign nationals. The 13,000 or so cases brought before the Polish courts against Polish citizens also included the trials of former concentration camp prisoners accused of murdering or mistreating their fellow inmates.[10] Sometimes, as in the trials of Majdanek and Stutthof staff (April-May 1946), members of the SS and former prisoners sat next to each other in the dock.[11]

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7 Jerzy Rawicz, "Nie wszyscy byli bohaterami", *Robotnik*, 20 Jan. 1948.

8 On this subject, see, inter alia: Włodzimierz Borodziej, "'Hitleristische Verbrechen'. Die Ahndung deutscher Kriegs- und Besatzungsverbrechen in Polen" in Norbert Frei (ed.) *Transnationale Vergangenheitspolitik. Der Umgang mit deutschen Kriegsverbrechen in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 2006.

9 Leszek Kubicki, *Zbrodnie wojenne w świetle prawa polskiego*, Warszawa 1963, pp. 180-181.

10 In *Wolni Ludzie* I found mention of at least 35 trials of Polish prisoner functionaries. There are sure to have been far more.

11 Indictment against Herman Vogel, Wilhelm Gerstenmeier, Anton Ternes, Teodor Schölen, Heinz Stalp, Edmund Pohlman, 4 Oct. 1944, AIPN, Sąd Specjalny Karny (SSK) w Lu-

The trial of Rudolf Höss, March 1947. Overall view of the courtroom. The defendant is seated, in the upper left-hand corner (courtesy of APMAB).

Proceedings were usually commenced on the basis of denunciations made by former camp comrades or reports from the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP). The trials were a legally sanctioned means of holding the perpetrators to account. Earlier, immediately after the liberation of the camps, lynchings of the SS and certain prisoner functionaries had been common.[12] "I'm surprised only that he had the courage to return to

blinie 293. See also: Cyprian Tadeusz, Sawicki Jerzy, Siewierski Mieczysław, *Głos ma prokurator...*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 11-12; Judgment in the case of John P., Jozef R., Wacław K., Kazimierz K., Wanda K., Gerda S., Elżbieta B., Ewa P., Jenny-Wanda B., Aleksy D., Franciszek Sz., Tadeusz K., Jan P., Jan B., Erna B., 31 May 1946, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 423.

12 Numerous memoirs and eyewitness accounts mention lynchings of former prisoner functionaries in the first days following the liberation of the camps. See, inter alia: Stanisław Grzesiuk, *Pięć lat kacetu*, Warszawa 1968, pp. 232, 345; Stanisław Nogaj, *Gusen—pamiętnik dziennikarza*, Katowice-Chorzów 1945, p. 43. Eyewitness accounts: Adam Stręk (Bergen-Belsen), Karta Centre, ISFLDP 054; Józef Szkuta, Karta Centre, MSDP 123.

Poland […]," wrote a former camp comrade of one of the accused *Kapos* in a letter to his family. "He was lucky that in the autumn of 1944 he was transferred from Gusen to another camp, because he would not have even got outside the gates on liberation day. Indeed, no one who had loyally served the Nazis left the camp alive. [...] many of my friends and colleagues returned to Poland from Austria just so that they could capture him."[13]

Charges were brought against prisoners who had performed the roles of *Kapo* (prisoner functionary), *Blockälteste* (block senior), *Stubendienst* (barrack orderly), etc., within the administration of a camp.[14] The accused were tried under Articles 1 and 2 of the "Decree of 31 August 1944 Concerning the Punishment of Fascist–Hitlerite Criminals Guilty of Murder and Ill-treatment of the Civilian Population and of Prisoners of War, and the Punishment of Traitors to the Polish Nation", otherwise known as the August Decree.[15] The decree was amended on several occasions. Under the key amendment of 10 December 1946, which was in force during the period when most of the cases discussed here took place, Article 1 of the decree stipulated the death penalty for:

> any person who, assisting the authorities of the German State or of a State allied with it:
> 1) took part in committing acts of murder against the civilian population, members of the armed forces or prisoners of war; or
> 2) by giving information or detaining, acted to the detriment of persons wanted or persecuted by said authorities on political, national, religious or racial grounds.[16]

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13 Wojciech D. to Maria D., 9 Dec. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33.

14 Among the sources which deal more broadly with the issue of prisoner functionaries, with particular reference to the situation in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, are: Imtraud Heike, Bernhard Strebel, "Häftlingsselbstverwaltung und Funktionshäftlinge im Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück" in C. Fuellberg-Stolberg et al. (eds) *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern Bergen-Belsen und Ravensbrück*, Bremen 1994; Anette Neumann, "Funktionshaeftlinge im Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück" in Werner Röhr and Brigitte Berlekamp (eds) *Tod oder Überleben? Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Ravensbrück. Bulletin für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung*, Berlin 2001; Bernhard Strebel, *Das KZ Ravensbrück. Geschichte eines Lagerkomplexes*, Paderborn 2003, pp. 228-241.

15 Decree of the PKWN of 31 August 1944 Concerning the Punishment of Fascist-Hitlerite Criminals Guilty of Murder and Ill-treatment of the Civilian Population and of Prisoners of War, and the Punishment of Traitors to the Polish Nation, Journal of Laws 1944, no. 4, item 16.

16 Declaration of the Minister of Justice of 11 December 1946 Concerning the Announcement of the Unified Text of the Decree of 31 August 1944 Concerning the Punishment of Fascist-Hitlerite Criminals Guilty of Murder and Ill-treatment of the Civilian Population and of Prisoners of War, and the Punishment of Traitors to the Polish Nation, Journal of Laws 1946, no. 69, item 377.

Article 2 of the decree stipulated imprisonment for a period of not less than three years, or the death penalty, for:

> any person who, assisting the authorities of the German State or of a State allied with it, acted in any other manner or in any other circumstances than those indicated in Article 1 to the detriment of the Polish State, of a Polish corporate body, or of civilians, members of the armed forces and prisoners of war.

Furthermore, Article 5, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the decree provided that although "the fact that an act or omission was caused by a threat or order […] does not exempt from criminal responsibility", the court in such a case could mitigate the sentence "taking into account the circumstances of the perpetrator and of the deed". Against this background, a dispute arose over whether the provisions concerning a state of necessity were applicable to the August Decree; in 1948, the Supreme Court (SN) ruled that they were not.[17] The decree was watered down once again with the introduction of a new provision (Article 5, paragraph 3) in 1948. This stated that in the case of crimes prosecuted under Article 1, point 2, "extraordinary mitigation of punishment" was possible also in other circumstances, not just in cases where the accused had acted under threat or order.[18]

We do not know to what extent exactly the trials of concentration camp prisoners were used as an instrument of political struggle in Poland. According to Andrzej Rzepliński, although the August Decree "was not intrinsically a Communist legislative act", from 1948 onwards it was employed by the Polish authorities to defeat political opponents.[19] As Andrzej Pasek writes, by 1956 approximately 300 members of the Home Army (AK), the Government Delegation for Poland (an agency of the Polish Government-in-Exile), and other organisations of the Polish Underground, had been sentenced on the basis of the August Decree.[20] We also know that in the years 1948-1956 many former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps were arrested and tried for alleged activities in the anti-communist resistance movement. It is not unlikely that in certain Stalinist political trials the

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17 Andrzej Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym z lat 1944-1956*, Wrocław 2002, p. 146.

18 Decree of 3 April 1948 on the Amendment to the Decree of 31 August 1944 Concerning the Punishment of Fascist-Hitlerite Criminals Guilty of Murder and Ill-treatment of the Civilian Population and of Prisoners of War, and the Punishment of Traitors to the Polish Nation (Journal of Laws 1948, no. 18, item 124). For the interpretation of this decree cf.: Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym*, p. 162.

19 Andrzej Rzepliński, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej? Sprawy karne oskarżonych o wymordowanie Żydów w Jedwabnem w świetle zasady rzetelnego procesu" in Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak (eds), *Wokół Jedwabnego. Studia*, Vol. I, Warszawa 2002, p. 356.

20 Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym*, pp. 200-203.

accused's concentration camp past was used against them. Of the cases discussed here, only one bore the hallmarks of a political trial. This was the case of Maria Bortnowska, director of the Information Bureau of the Polish Red Cross, who had been imprisoned in Ravensbrück between 1943 and 1945.[21]

After the liberation of the camp, Bortnowska returned to Poland, where she resumed work for the Polish Red Cross. In the spring of 1947, she was arrested and charged with having "assisted the authorities of the German State" whilst in Ravensbrück. "As a so-called barrack orderly, and then as a block senior […], she acted to the detriment of Polish women prisoners in the camp through systematic beatings and bullying, such as by deliberately extending the roll call and obstructing the supply of food, medicines and clothing to the prisoners."[22] The District Court in Warsaw sentenced Bortnowska to three years' imprisonment with the confiscation of property.[23] Although the Supreme Court dismissed her appeal, a year later Bortnowska was pardoned.[24] She was spared the rest of her prison sentence but the additional penalties were upheld.[25] Bortnowska was not rehabilitated until after the October Thaw, in 1958.[26]

On the basis of the court records it is not possible to determine definitively whether Bortnowska's trial had been political in nature. This conjecture is supported not only by her later rehabilitation but also by the course of the trial and the grounds of the judgement. On the other hand, according to the account given by one of her former camp comrades, Bortnowska did indeed mistreat some of the prisoners under her control:

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21 See: Wanda Sokołowska, "O Marii Bortnowskiej i Biurze Informacji PCK", *Więź* 12 (1975), p. 117. The Bortnowska case is also recalled by Bortnowska's friend from the camp, Karolina Lanckorońska. In her memoirs, published a few years ago, she claims that the charges levelled at Bortnowska after the war were politically motivated (Karolina Lanckorońska, *Wspomnienia wojenne*, Kraków 2003, p. 329).

22 Indictment against Maria Bortnowska, Public Prosecutor for the District Court in Warsaw, 11 Jun. 1947, State Archive of the Capital City of Warsaw, Milanówek Branch (Archiwum m.st. Warszawy, Oddział w Milanówku), Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

23 Judgment of the District Court in Warsaw in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 14 Aug. 1947, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

24 Judgment of the Supreme Court (SN), cassation appeal hearing in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 8 Apr. 1948, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

25 Chief Courts Supervisor at the Ministry of Justice to the District Court in Warsaw, 15 Jul. 1948, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

26 Judgment of the SN in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 6 Mar. 1958, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

> I didn't attend [Bortnowska's] trial because if I'd given evidence her sentence would have been twice as long. [...] She condemned me to death in Ravensbrück [...] But I was not the one who accused her. I don't know [who it was], perhaps fellow inmates who had a score to settle. Later on, I didn't even know what had happened to her. When the trial began, Krysia Żywulska said to me: "Listen, that [Bortnowska] is on trial. Didn't you tell us how she had… Let's put you forward as a witness." I replied: "No. […] there are so many criminals being tried for genocide nowadays that I don't think it's the right moment to be even getting with Poles, even despicable ones. First we must concentrate on settling accounts with war criminals. Let her live with her conscience."[27]

The above account and the evidence given by certain witnesses suggest that Bortnowska's trial had not been manufactured by the Polish authorities. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the authorities had used the opportunity to remove or discredit a person whom they regarded as inconvenient—Bortnowska, as director of the Information Bureau of the Polish Red Cross, had information concerning the fate of 14,700 Polish officers murdered by the NKVD in the spring of 1940 in the so-called Katyń massacre. What is interesting is the fact that the court rejected certain witnesses called by the defence.[28] The judgement of the Supreme Court stated that the decision of the District Court had been justified because those witnesses were to give evidence in regard to the same events that other defence witnesses had described. However, this argument did not prevent the judges from calling numerous prosecution witnesses, who knew only by hearsay about Bortnowska's alleged behaviour in Ravensbrück and only from witnesses who had testified earlier.[29] This is all the more striking given that, in justifying its verdict, the District Court pointed to the greater number of witnesses for the prosecution than for the defence.[30]

That the panel of judges had been under pressure from the authorities is also implied by the argumentation used in the grounds of the judgement, according to which the accused had favoured certain prisoners at the cost of the many. Those

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27 Interview with Krystyna T.

28 Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548: Appeal against the judgment of the District Court in Warsaw of 14 Aug. 1947 in the case of Maria Bortnowska, Warszawa 27 Jan. 1948; Judgment of the SN in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 8 Apr. 1948; Judgment of the SN in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 6 Mar. 1958.

29 Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548: Record of the main hearing in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 5-7, 13-14 Aug. 1947; Sentence of the District Court in Warsaw in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 14 Aug. 1947.

30 Judgment of the District Court in Warsaw in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 14 Aug. 1947, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

privileged by Bortnowska had supposedly included women from the "upper echelons", i.e., the intelligentsia and the aristocracy.[31] Even the Supreme Court decided that the findings of the District Court in this regard were "not supported by the evidence" and that the judges had adopted this classification *a priori*.[32] The court judgement also ignored the fact that dozens of the accused's former camp comrades from Poland and abroad had spontaneously sprung to her defence.[33] In letters sent in to the court, they emphasised that Bortnowska had treated her function within the camp as a public obligation, that she had tried, where possible, to use her position to help others, and that she had shown exceptional dedication and on several occasions had risked punishment by the SS. If on occasion she had struck or insulted one of the women, they argued, this had been dictated by the need to protect the prisoners in general, for instance, to protect them from collective punishment. They attributed the accusations made against Bortnowska to the personal dislike shown towards her by women who had been sent to Ravensbrück in civilian transports during the Warsaw Uprising. These statements reveal the resentment and sense of superiority that political prisoners felt towards people who had been sent to the camp "by accident". Thus, for instance, in a letter to the Supreme Court, Zdeňka Nedvědová-Nejedlá, head of the Czechoslovak Association of Former Women Political Prisoners of Ravensbrück, wrote:

> Sister Bortnowska's personal conduct already excludes the possibility that she behaved badly towards other women prisoners. However, if one of the Polish women claims that Bortnowska struck her, then perhaps it is true, since we prisoner functionaries could never claim that we never struck anyone. There were moments in the life of the camp when even this sort of measure was necessary for the good of the prisoners in general. If sister Bortnowska was provoked into doing what she did by one of the women from the so-called Warsaw transport—the moral dregs of Warsaw, who voluntarily put themselves into the "care of the Germans" [...], then she would only be blamed for it by someone who knows nothing about the reality of the camps. Those sycophantic women, dancing attendance on the Germans, declared indignantly that

31 Ibidem.

32 Judgment of the SN in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 8 Apr. 1948, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

33 See, inter alia, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548: Executive Board of the PZbWP Branch in Łódź to the Prosecutor of the Special Court in Warsaw, 6 Aug. 1947; Statement of the Presidium of the "Ravensbrück" club sent to ZG PZbWP, 30 Jun. 1947; Official letter from the Czechoslovak Association of Former Women Political Prisoners of Ravensbrück, 27 Jun. 1947; Statement of Zdeňka Nedvědová-Nejedlá in the case of Maria Bortnowska, 6 Jun. 1947. Cf. also: Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 28 Aug. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 5; Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP, 28 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 4.

> they were not political prisoners. They did not even want to speak to us until, robbed of their possessions and ravaged by life in the camp, they needed our help.[34]

If the Polish authorities had indeed wanted to remove Maria Bortnowska from public life, then they were only partially successful. Bortnowska received the mildest punishment envisaged under Article 2 of the August Decree; she was released after one year. The explanation for such "lenient" treatment of the accused should be sought in the solidarity campaign organised by her former camp comrades. Faced with international protest and interventions from people such as Zdeňka Nedvědová-Nejedlá, the Polish authorities were probably forced to suspend execution of the sentence.

In other Eastern bloc countries there were similar, even more drastic cases of a person's concentration camp past being used for political ends. A purge of former Buchenwald prisoner functionaries was carried out in the GDR in 1950-1955.[35] During the war, Buchenwald had come to be dominated by German Communists. By removing criminal inmates from positions of authority, they had helped to mitigate the camp regime, but the main purpose of their activities had been to protect members of their own organisation, often at the cost of other prisoners, and having power over life and death had led some to depravity.[36] Already in late 1946, the SED launched an internal investigation to determine whether the accusations made against certain German Communists imprisoned in Buchenwald had any justification. The investigation was prompted by accusations from former camp comrades publicised in the American press, as well as by the Buchenwald trial, organised by the Americans, in which the indictment of certain prisoner functionaries was also considered. Despite earlier findings, the final report of the SED's special investigative commission cleared the members of the KPD within Buchenwald of all charges. At the beginning of the 1950s, the matter was resurrected by the Soviet occupation authorities and the SED leadership and used as a political tool. It was an aspect of the factional struggle between Communist activists, such as Walter Ulbricht, who had spent the Nazi period in the Soviet Union, and those who had remained in Germany during the war, usually incarcerated in concentration camps. In 1950, Ernst Busse, a *Kapo* at the camp hospital, and Erich Reschke, the camp senior (*Lagerältester*)—both

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34 Chairwoman of the Association of Former Women Political Prisoners of Ravensbrück, Zdeňka Nedvědová-Nejedlá, to the president of the SN, 3 Apr. 1948, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy Oddział w Milanówku, Sąd Okr. w Warszawie (1945-1950) 1548.

35 On the post-war history of the Communist prisoner functionaries from Buchenwald see: *Der „gesäuberte" Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald*, edited by Lutz Niethammer, Berlin 1994, pp. 77-91; Hansel, Reuter, *Das kurze Leben der VVN*, pp. 392-411.

36 On the subject of the German Communists in Buchenwald see, inter alia: Hartewig, "Wolf unter Wölfen?" in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, Vol. 2.

members of the communist resistance movement in Buchenwald—were arrested by the authorities of the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. Having been interrogated for several months by the Soviet Military Tribunal, both were sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to the Gulag. Ernst Busse died in Vorkuta in 1952; Erich Reschke returned to the GDR in 1955 and was rehabilitated. Over subsequent years, many other prominent Buchenwald inmates were investigated by the SED and either excluded from the party or demoted.

Irrespective of the extent to which the trials of prisoner functionaries in Poland were used as an instrument of political struggle, the principle of a fair trial was often ignored. In an article on the settling of scores with war criminals in Poland in 1944-1950/55, Włodzimierz Borodziej writes that although the adoption of Soviet models by the military courts did not lead to the "radicalisation and brutalisation" of the biggest trials of Nazi war criminals before the Supreme National Tribunal (NTN), it could have "acted to the detriment of people accused in less spectacular cases".[37] One example of such brutalisation is the case of two prisoner functionaries from Stutthof accused of mistreating their fellow inmates. At the trial, both renounced their earlier testimony, claiming that they had been beaten during interrogation.[38] This would appear to be confirmed by the minutes of the interrogation, which was conducted in both cases by the same Security Service officer.[39] The minutes show that the suspects not only admitted all the charges but also added new ones themselves. One of them was to have said, for instance, that he had mistreated other prisoners "willingly and with pleasure".[40] The investigating officer also asked him whether he thought that "the government had been better before 1939" than at the time of the interrogation, to which the suspect was to have replied in the affirmative.[41] For sure, these were not isolated

37 Borodziej, "Hitleristische Verbrechen", p. 415. On the subject of military jurisprudence in Poland in the years 1944-1956 see also: Jerzy Poksiński, " Sądownictwo wojskowe w latach 1944-1956 (Rola i działalność, kadry oraz organizacja)" in idem, *„My sędziowie nie od Boga..." Z dziejów Sądownictwa Wojskowego PRL 1944-1956. Materiały i dokumenty*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 9-42; Bogdan Musial, "NS-Kriegsverbrecher vor polnischen Gerichten", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 47, 1 (1999), pp. 54-56.

38 Record of the main hearing in the case of Jan P., 4 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 420; Record of the interrogation of suspect Jan B., 14 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 421.

39 Record of the interrogation of suspect Jan P., Provincial Office of State Security (WUBP) in Bydgoszcz, 12 May 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 419; Record of the interrogation of suspect Jan B., WUBP in Bydgoszcz, 13 May 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 421.

40 Record of the interrogation of suspect Jan P., WUBP in Bydgoszcz, 12 May 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 419.

41 Judgment in the case of John P., Jozef R., Wacław K., Kazimierz K., Wanda K., Gerda S., Elżbieta B., Ewa P., Jenny-Wanda B., Aleksy D., Franciszek S., Tadeusz K., Jan P., Jan B., Erna B., 31 May 1946, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 423.

cases. One may assume that, when conducting investigations in cases involving former concentration camp prisoners, Security Service officers often abused and mistreated suspects. One may also surmise that, as with many cases prosecuted in Poland during the Stalinist period, the courts were guilty of other irregularities during the trials of former prisoner functionaries. This did not necessarily imply harsher sentences and could sometimes work in the accused's favour.[42]

According to Andrzej Pasek's calculations, of the 12,892 people convicted in the years 1946-1950 under the August Decree, 1,113 received a death sentence, 284 received a sentence of life imprisonment, 871 were sentenced to more than 10 years in prison, and 10,624 to less than 10 years in prison.[43] Although the punishments envisaged under the August Decree were very severe, in most cases the courts did not impose the maximum sentence. Pasek does not state how many people were acquitted. Of the 17 prisoners and prisoner functionaries whose trials are discussed here, three were acquitted, six were sentenced to death, and the remainder were given prison terms of between three and fifteen years, although two were eventually pardoned.[44]

Controversies Surrounding the Trials of Prisoner Functionaries

When delivering judgements in cases involving prisoner functionaries, judges and jurors were faced with the problem that commonly accepted legal and moral standards could not be applied to the reality of the camps. Former prisoners often raised the objection that those who had not experienced the camps at first hand were not in a position to evaluate their actions properly. In his account of Mauthausen-Gusen published in 1945, Stanisław Nogaj wrote that life in the camp involved "a hard and tragic daily struggle for survival under hitherto unknown

42 Rzepliński, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej?".

43 Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym*, p. 173.

44 AIPN: Sąd Okr. w Toruniu, Wydz. Zamiejscowy we Włocławku 70; Sąd Okr. w Białymstoku 141; Sąd Okr. w Szczecinie 35; SSK w Gdańsku 417-423; Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262, 471-471a, 498-498a; Sąd Okr. w Radomiu 217, 102; Sąd Okr. w Trzciance 56; Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33; Sąd Okr. w Gliwicach 73, 83; Sąd Okr. w Jeleniej Górze 149. Archiwum m.st. Warszawy (ekspozytura w Milanówku), Sąd Okr. w Warszawie 1945-19501548. AAN, SN 2/9251. In the case of one of those acquitted, an extraordinary appeal was brought before the SN, but I was unable to establish the subsequent fate of the accused. Four of the accused were women. One of those standing trial was an ethnic German, two had signed the German People's List, one had been sent to the camp as a Jew, and the other accused were Poles, according to the court files.

conditions" and that those who had not experienced it were best advised to remain silent and not to "judge those whom someone has casually accused".[45] A few pages further on, he added: "Today, we must look on the perpetrators of those bloody crimes through different eyes. If I were a judge, I would not be able to judge them beyond the reality of the camp."[46] The writer Jerzy Putrament also warned against passing hasty judgement on former prisoners. He noted that the camp system had been purposely organised in such a way as to deprave its victims, and that the unspeakable conditions of the concentration camps had led many to moral turpitude. It was, claimed Putrament, easier to evaluate the extreme cases, such as that of former Gross-Rosen barrack orderly Antoni Kossecki—a protagonist of Jerzy Andrzejewski's famous novel, *Ashes and Diamonds*—who cruelly tortured his fellow inmates, than to evaluate the much more common situation of people committing minor offences at the cost of others in order to save their own lives. Consequently, Putrament suggested that a special citizens' tribunal be appointed, composed of former prisoners, who would decide whether the accused had indeed violated "the norms of the prisoner community within the camp".[47]

However, there was equally no consensus amongst the victims themselves on how to assess the behaviour of their former comrades. What for some was absolutely deserving of condemnation, such as theft, beatings, or protecting one human life at the expense of another, for others was justified under camp conditions. The dilemmas that emerged in the courtroom were also reflected in the press debate held in *Wolni Ludzie* and other newspapers and magazines on the trials of prisoner functionaries. In 1947-1948, *Wolni Ludzie* continuously reported on the trials taking place in Poland and abroad. The case of Roman Zenkteller, the chief prisoner–doctor at the camp hospital in Birkenau, caused the biggest stir.

In the analysis below, I shall refer primarily to the case of Zenkteller and to the trials of four other prisoner functionaries:

1) Roman Zenkteller, born in 1889, was a physician by profession and participated in the Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918-1919. Captured by the Germans in 1939, he was transferred from a prisoner-of-war camp to Auschwitz; in 1944 he was evacuated to the West. At the end of 1946, Zenkteller was extradited to Poland from the American occupation zone of Germany. The accusation made against him was that, as a prisoner functionary and hospital doctor in Auschwitz I and in Birkenau, he had participated in the selection of prisoners and had abused patients and hospital staff. Zenkteller was acquitted in a trial before the District Court in Kraków in the second half of 1948. The Supreme Court rejected the prosecutor's appeal. However, following an extraordinary

45 Stanisław Nogaj, *Gusen*, p. 38.

46 Ibid., p. 42.

47 Jerzy Putrament, "Notatki o Oświęcimiu", *Odrodzenie*, 6 Jun. 1948.

review of the sentence by the main Supreme Court prosecutor, the case was submitted for reconsideration. It is unknown what happened to the accused thereafter.[48]

2) Jan P. was born in 1920. Arrested in the spring of 1945, he was tried in 1945-1946 along with 14 other Stutthof staff as well as Polish and German prisoner functionaries before the Special Criminal Court (SSK) in Gdańsk. The accusation made against Jan P. was that, as a *Kapo* and *Vorarbeiter* in Stutthof, he had participated in the murder of inmates and had abused prisoners, beating them and forcing them to work beyond their physical capabilities. The prosecution was unable to prove, however, that Jan P. had caused the death of any of his camp comrades. He was thus acquitted.[49]
3) Feliks W., born in 1908, was a physician by profession. Arrested by the Gestapo, he was sent to Auschwitz in June 1940 in the first transport of Polish political prisoners. He was arrested once again in the summer of 1945. The accusation made against him was that, as a nurse in the sick room at Auschwitz I, he had killed inmates by injecting them with poison on the orders of the camp authorities. Józef Cyrankiewicz, among others, gave evidence against Feliks W. During the trial, however, the accused managed to show that he had not murdered prisoners on the orders of the SS. He admitted only to the fact that, in agreement with other Polish political prisoners, he had ended the lives of six German prisoner functionaries who had regularly abused inmates. Feliks W. was acquitted in a trial before the District Court in Kraków in the autumn of 1947.[50]
4) Józef K., born in 1903, was an office worker. He was arrested in the spring of 1947. The accusation made against him was that, as a *Kapo* in Stutthof, he had abused prisoners of various nationalities through beatings, forced labour, and the confiscation of food. The trial took place before the District Court in Białystok in December 1947. During the trial it emerged that the accused had not been a *Kapo* at all, merely a senior worker. Józef K. was sentenced

48 List of war criminals from the Auschwitz concentration camp extradited from the American Zone as at 25 Feb. 1947, AIPN, Polska Misja Wojskowa—Badanie Zbrodni Wojennych (PMW-BZW) 173; Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251; Sentence of the SN. Cassation appeal hearing in the case of Roman Zenkteller, 5 Oct. 1949, AAN, SN 2/9251; Official letter from the Minister of Justice to the Polish Military Mission affiliated to the Office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes at the Control Council in Germany, 26 Jul. 1950, AIPN, PMW-BZW 608.

49 AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 417-423.

50 AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262: Indictment against Feliks W., 12 Sep. 1946; Judgment in the case of Feliks W. issued by the District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 29 Oct. 1947.

to three years' imprisonment, which was the lowest penalty envisaged under Article 2 of the August Decree. Four months later he was pardoned.[51]

5) Józef Koł., born in 1896, was an officer in the Polish Army and, like Zenkteller, a participant in the Wielkopolska Uprising. Arrested in the spring of 1940, he was sent to Dachau and then to Gusen. In the summer of 1944 he was transferred to a camp in Linz, where he remained until its liberation. After returning to Poland, Koł. was arrested in the autumn of 1946. The accusation made against him was that, as a *Kapo* and then a block senior in Mauthausen-Gusen, he had abused inmates by beating and kicking them, forcing them to work beyond their physical capabilities, and stealing their food. He was also accused of having regularly insulted Polish prisoners, affronting their sense of national dignity, and of having participated in the murder of inmates within the camp. In November 1947, he was tried under Article 1(1) and Article 2 of the August Decree before the District Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski. Despite the fact that the prosecution failed to prove that the accused had been directly involved in executions carried out by the SS, Józef Koł. was sentenced to death. The Supreme Court dismissed the defendant's appeal. Józef Koł. was hanged in July 1948.[52]

Apart from the case of Józef Koł., all of the above trials ended in the defendant being acquitted or receiving the shortest possible sentence; the final outcome of the Zenkteller trial is unknown. As mentioned earlier, the punishments meted out to prisoner functionaries were often very severe. However, the trials which culminated in a lenient sentence provide the most interesting material for analysis, since the acquittal of the accused, or the mitigation of charges, usually resulted from disputes that took place within the courtroom.

A controversial issue both in the press debate and in the courtroom was whether the mere fact of having assumed a function within a concentration camp signified corruption or whether there were cases in which prisoner functionaries had behaved with decency. This problem was addressed by, among others, Eugenia Kocwa, a former inmate of Ravensbrück. In an article published in July 1945 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kocwa argued that although prisoner functionaries had sometimes used their position to help others, in most cases the prisoner

51 AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Białymstoku 141: Indictment against Józef K., 26 Aug. 1947; Judgment of the District Court in Białystok in the case of Józef K., 18 Dec. 1947; Ministry of Justice to the District Court in Białystok, 21 Apr. 1948.

52 AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33: Indictment against Józef Koł. Prosecutor, District Court in Jelenia Góra, 31 Jul. 1947; Record of the main hearing in the case of Józef Koł., 22 Nov. 1947; Judgment of the SN. Cassation appeal hearing, 12 Mar. 1948; Information from the Prosecutor, District Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski, for the Criminal Division of the District Court, 29 Jul. 1948.

"self-administration" was filled with "brutal and egotistical individuals".[53] She also noted that prisoner functionaries had played a significant role in the system of terror: "It is clear that without the cooperation of the prisoners, the whole structure of the concentration camp would not have been sustainable, at the very least due to insufficient numbers of supervisors (not to mention other reasons)."

Rene Skalska, another Ravensbrück inmate, also opposed the *a priori* condemnation of prisoner functionaries. In an article entitled "Not all Prisoner Functionaries were Executioners", she emphasised that Polish women prisoners had used their privileged position in the camp hierarchy to save others, often at a risk to their own life: "When they returned to Poland, prisoner functionaries did not boast about their work within the camps. The other women prisoners did not speak about it either. But today, when one hears phrases such as: 'whoever was a prisoner functionary helped the Germans and collaborated with them', we must stand in their defence."[54]

The accused often defended themselves by claiming that they had taken on the role of prisoner functionary at the instigation of their fellow comrades, and that their intention had been, where possible, to protect inmates against the arbitrary actions of the SS.[55] However, even those who assumed positions of authority with the approval of their comrades and cooperated with the camp resistance movement often found themselves in a highly ambiguous situation; forced to obey the orders of the SS, they inevitably became part of the machinery of terror. Recognising this ambivalence, Roman Frister, a Jewish former Auschwitz inmate, wrote in defence of Roman Zenkteller that, although acceptance of the role of camp senior (*Lagerältester*) was itself an offence, it was important to realise that, in taking this decision, the physician had faced the following dilemma: "Not to accept the role would have entailed suffering the plight of other prisoners and helplessly observing the injustices taking place in the hospital; to accept it meant shouldering a huge burden and performing the difficult role of an intermediary between the inmates and the oppressor."[56]

Neither in the press nor in the courtroom, however, was the issue raised of the extent to which the solidarity shown by prisoner functionaries working on behalf of the resistance movement extended beyond members of their own organisation or political or national community. It was taken as self-evident that prisoner func-

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53 Eugenia Kocwa, "Prawo życia", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 8 Jul. 1945.

54 R[ene] Skalska, "Nie wszyscy funkcyjni byli katami", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Apr. 1948.

55 See, inter alia: Record of the main hearing in the case of Jan P., 4 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 420; Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251.

56 Roman Frister, "W sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Aug. 1948.

tionaries who were members of the Polish Underground acted for the benefit of all prisoners, regardless of their nationality or political convictions. However, some of the witness testimonies reveal severe antagonism between various groups of inmates. Thus, for instance, in the trial of Stutthof staff, Jan P. defended himself by claiming that he had been assigned the role of *Kapo* at the instigation of the Polish inmates, who wanted him to protect them against prisoners of other nationalities who were stealing their bread. Jan P. went on to say that he had never abused prisoners; on occasion he might have "struck one of Ukrainians for stealing bread from the Poles", but nothing more than that.[57] The case records also reveal a high incidence of class conflict. The indictment against Józef Koł. states that he harboured a particular hatred of intellectuals, calling them "Polish pigs", "the shit-stained Polish intelligentsia", and "teacher-shit".[58] The accused defended himself by claiming that the Polish intelligentsia had formed a closed caste within the camp that was set apart from the other prisoners.[59]

The camp "aristocracy", who were usually willing to defend the accused, saw the role of prisoner functionaries rather differently than did prisoners on the lowest level of the camp hierarchy. This difference is well illustrated by two accounts relating to the Zenkteller case. In defence of his former boss, Franciszek Piechowiak, the former camp dentist, said that Zenkteller had admitted to the sick room inmates who were protected by the camp resistance movement. In a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie*, he wrote:

> If special assistance was needed, Dr Zenkteler would, at my request, never refuse it; this was the case with Mr Tołłoczko, the former Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Mr Gnoiński, the former Provincial Governor of Kraków, Professor Winid, Major Molenda, and dozens of other comrades.[60]

Henryk Korotyński saw the situation rather differently. Wishing to illustrate the social stratification of the prisoner community, he described a day in the life of one of the camp "aristocrats", a Polish political prisoner and *Oberkapo* (chief *Kapo*) of the food stores:

> Dressed in an impeccably tailored striped uniform and waving a little cane, he pondered how he would spend the day. He had some business to attend to at the FKL [*Frauenkonzentrationslager*—the women's camp] and at the Sauna[61]; his friend Zosia

57 Record of the main hearing in the case of Jan P., 4 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 420.

58 Indictment against Józef K. Prosecutor, District Court in Jelenia Góra, 31 Jul. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33.

59 Sentence in the case of Józef Koł. District Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski, 22 Nov. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33.

60 Franciszek Piechowiak, "Sprawa doktora Zenktelera. Zdolny lekarz", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947. The name Zenkteler/Zenkteller is written in different ways in different documents.

61 The Sauna was a building in Birkenau where the incoming inmates were shaved, tattooed,

> in Camp B had invited him to dinner. Besides that, he hoped to visit two patients at the KB [*Krankenbau*—the camp hospital] to see if Dr Zenkteller was taking care of them as promised.[62]

Korotyński condemned neither the *Oberkapo* nor Dr Zenkteller. However, he presented the assistance that Zenkteller ostensibly gave to certain prisoners not as the consequence of a campaign organised by the resistance movement to protect particularly vulnerable or important individuals, but rather as the outcome of the shady dealings of the camp "aristocracy".

Leon Piechna, a former Auschwitz inmate, also drew attention to the different way in which Zenkteller was perceived and evaluated by members of the camp aristocracy on the one hand, and the remaining prisoners on the other. In a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie* he wrote:

> A person who survived Birkenau, who lived there for around two years and did not belong to the privileged camp "aristocracy", and who witnessed Zenkteller's behaviour at first hand, that person [...] will not be able in all good conscience to excuse the actions of a man whose cruelty and boorishness in relation to his fellow prisoners is deserving of condemnation."[63]

We must not allow, Piechna appealed, "the abuse of one human being by another to find justification, for whatever reason, in the eyes of the public."

Paradoxically, it was precisely former prisoner functionaries who were seen as more credible witnesses during trials, since they had a better understanding of the realities of the camp on account of their privileged position. It would seem that judges were also guided by the *a priori* assumption that members of the intelligentsia and members of the resistance movement were more trustworthy than other prisoners. In the grounds of the judgement in the Zenkteller case, the court considered the testimonies of the defence witnesses to be more credible "not only due to their lack of bias" but also because those witnesses "are mostly doctors, nurses, and intelligent people", who "had a better understanding of the situation and were more aware of what was going on around them compared to those witnesses who base their assertions only on momentary observation of certain aspects of the accused's activities, from which they draw conclusions".[64]

The judges in the trials of prisoner functionaries also faced the question of whether the accused had acted on their own initiative or on the orders of the SS, and what consequences they risked for failing to follow orders. The defendants often

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"bathed" and given prisoners' uniforms.

62 Henryk Korotyński, "Kiedy będziemy znali Oświęcim?", *Odrodzenie*, 24 Aug. 1947.

63 Leon Piechna, "Jeszcze sprawa Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Aug. 1948.

64 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251.

claimed that they had acted on the orders of the camp authorities and that refusal to follow orders would have resulted in death. Although, under Article 5 of the August Decree, an act caused by a threat or order did not exempt the accused from criminal responsibility, it could be regarded as a mitigating circumstance. To prove that the accused had acted under duress, however, was usually very difficult. For instance, in his evidence against Feliks W., the Auschwitz nurse accused of injecting prisoners with lethal doses of phenol on the orders of the SS, Józef Cyrankiewicz stated: "There were Poles amongst the doctors who refused to participate; it was done by degenerates, fanatics, bootlickers, or terrified individuals."[65] A more cautious approach to the issue was taken by Stanisław Kłodziński, also a member of the Auschwitz resistance movement. The accused, claimed Kłodziński, administered the injections "under duress; to disobey an order was a very dangerous thing".[66] At the same time, Kłodziński noted that "there were doctors and nurses who refused to administer lethal injections". "Of the people I know who refused to obey that order, none were executed. It was, however, [illegible] a risk, and a [...] faint-hearted individual could [illegible] have feared the death penalty."

The judges in the Zenkteller trial faced a similar dilemma when attempting to assess the role of the accused in the selection of sick prisoners. Some witnesses alleged that, when admitting prisoners to the sick room, Zenkteller had divided them into three groups; those whom he classified as the most seriously ill would be removed to a separate block, from where they would be sent to the gas chambers. In the grounds of its judgement the court rejected the testimony of the prosecution witnesses, citing the evidence given by other prisoners, who claimed that being sent to the block for seriously ill prisoners was not tantamount to a death sentence. The court also argued that Zenkteller was not the only person who participated in the selection procedure, and that to disobey an order of the camp authorities risked terrible punishment; it would have been pointless anyway, since the activities of prisoner doctors were monitored by the SS.[67] The prosecutor countered this line of argument. He stated that acting on the orders of the camp authorities, and the fact that the selection procedure was monitored by SS doctors, did not absolve the accused of the charge of having participated in murder. In his appeal, the prosecutor argued as follows:

> The view taken by the court does not take into account the fact that participation in acts of murder within the meaning of Article 1(1) of the Decree [of 31 August 1944] also occurs when the perpetrator, having carried out a certain action, hands over a

65 Record of the witness interrogation of Józef Cyrankiewicz, 13 Jul. 1945, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262.

66 Record of the witness interrogation of Stanisław Kłodziński, 10 Nov. 1945, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262.

67 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251.

> person condemned to death so that a further action may be carried out which leads to that person's murder. The selection procedure undertaken by the accused was such an action; it is completely irrelevant, as the court would have it, that the camp authorities would have carried out the selection procedure anyway, without the participation of the accused. Consequently, the view taken by the court that prisoner doctors cannot be held responsible for such actions, i.e. the selection or segregation of prisoners, on the part of the German camp authorities, is fundamentally mistaken. If one were to hold such a view, then all war criminals should be acquitted. Indeed, beginning with the trial in Nuremberg, the accused have all claimed that they were simply following the orders of their superiors.[68]

When defending their comrades' behaviour, former prisoners pointed to the ubiquitous brutality of camp life, in which beatings were the norm. The picture that emerges from the testimony of witnesses in the Zenkteller trial is one of relations between prisoners characterised by violence; this corresponds with the descriptions found in the stories of Tadeusz Borowski and even more so in the recollections of Stanisław Grzesiuk published at the end of the 1950s. "In the camps, if you weren't the one doing the beating," said one of the accused's former comrades, "then you were the one being beaten."[69] He added that if beatings were to be regarded as a crime, then 90 per cent of Polish prisoner functionaries would find themselves in the dock. A similar description of relations within the concentration camps was provided by one of the witnesses in the trial of Józef K. According to this witness, the year 1943, when the accused arrived at Stutthof, was a period of mass death: "At that time, no one paid any attention to pushing and pulling. The best of friends [illegible] became animals. Everyone tried to save his own life. [...] Perhaps [K.] did push someone, but no one would have paid any attention."[70]

A distinction was often made between beatings, which many regarded as "normal", and overt cruelty towards others.[71] "Although there were instances," said Stanisław Kłodziński, giving evidence in the trial of Feliks W., "when [the accused] hit someone, due to his position it was seen as acceptable under camp conditions; it did not take the form of sadism and did not suggest that he was ingratiating himself with the enemy."[72] Albin Mazurkiewicz, a former Auschwitz inmate, made a similar distinction. "Did Dr Zenkteller hit people?" he asked rhetorically in a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie*:

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68 Cassation appeal by the prosecutor at the District Court in Kraków filed with the SN Criminal Chamber (Centre for Field Sessions), 4 May 1949, AAN, SN 2/9251.

69 "Sądzimy Zentkellera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Jul. 1948 (statement by a former prisoner Marossany).

70 Record of the main hearing, 18 Dec. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Białymstoku 141.

71 "Sądzimy Zentkellera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Jul. 1948.

72 Record of the witness interrogation of Stanisław Kłodziński, 10 Nov. 1945, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262.

> I don't know, but one must assume that he did. I saw many doctors strike inmates, but in the camps violence was rife. Those who hit no one, but could have done so by virtue of their position, were in a tiny minority and were themselves beaten. I was in six camps and in each one people were beaten. It's another question whether people were abused. That's a different matter.[73]

Prisoners tried in various ways to rationalise their own conduct and that of their comrades. It was argued that although Zenkteller's behaviour had departed from the standards of "decency", it was thanks to those brutal methods that he had managed to discipline the corrupt and neglectful medical staff and had thus helped to improve the prisoners' lot.[74] Many argued that it would not have been possible to control such a huge mass of people without the use of force. Janusz Kledzik, a former orderly in the sick room at Birkenau, wrote in a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie* that Auschwitz had been a "Tower of Babel", both in terms of language and in terms of the prisoners' mental capacity, such that "severe measures" had sometimes been essential.[75] Another witness in the Zenkteller trial claimed that "the 'Muselmänner' were people who were physically weak and mentally numb. To make them understand what was expected of them, they had to be beaten".[76] The judges also adopted this line of argument. In the grounds of the judgement, the court stated that although the witness testimonies confirmed that the accused had reprimanded and even beaten prisoners, he had "done so in the interests of the prisoner community in general", and if on occasion he had struck someone unnecessarily, this had been caused by the specific conditions within the camp. In Auschwitz, the judges continued:

> there were huge numbers of prisoners of various nationalities, cultures, and social classes, of diverse habits, character, and mental strength; there were political prisoners with high moral standards alongside prisoners who were common criminals. Moreover, due to the risk of death at every step, most of the prisoners were depraved, having no regard for discipline or moral standards. Under such conditions, to maintain discipline—so important for the good of the prisoners overall—was extremely difficult, perhaps even impossible.[77]

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73 Albin Mazurkiewicz [letter], "Jeszcze w sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Sep. 1948.

74 *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947: "Winien czy nie winien? Sprawa doktora Zenktelera"; "Dzieje teatru K.B. w Brzezince" and *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Jul. 1948: "Cel nie uświęca środków. A jednak..."; "Sądzimy Zenktellera".

75 Janusz Kledzik [letter], "Jeszcze w sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Sep. 1948.

76 "Sądzimy Zentkellera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Jul. 1948.

77 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251.

Similar arguments were also used in other trials. One of the witnesses in the trial of Jan P., a former Stutthof inmate, argued that the accused had not abused the prisoners. It was true that he might have hit someone on occasion as a punishment for disorder, "but this was a necessity under camp conditions".[78] "I can't imagine the camp at all without the beatings," he continued. "For instance, it was impossible to distribute food without the use of a stick."

In the Zenkteller trial, the argument was also raised that in order to save the prisoners as a group, it was sometimes necessary to sacrifice the life of individuals. Many witnesses and contributors to the press debate cited the example of a doctor who had performed a delousing campaign during which the prisoners had stood naked for hours in the freezing cold. The campaign cost hundreds of lives, but—it was claimed—successfully prevented a typhus epidemic.[79] The court accepted this argument of the defence; the prosecution rejected it, however. In his appeal, the prosecutor argued that to cause the death of several hundred people during a disinfection campaign could not be justified on the grounds that it had benefited the other prisoners.[80]

Beatings were also sometimes presented as an alternative to reporting an event to the camp authorities, which could have entailed far worse consequences for the inmate concerned. "I admit that on occasion I was forced to hit someone when distributing food," said one of the accused in his own defence. "I preferred to take the matter into my own hands than to report it to my superiors, for this would have led to the patient being severely punished."[81] Józef Koł. adopted an almost identical line of defence, stating that he had only beaten prisoners when forced to do so: "If I hadn't done it, the SS would have done something worse."[82]

To understand the behaviour of the accused, attempts were made not only to find rational explanations but also to understand the psychological conditions of camp life. Nervous breakdown caused by the inhuman conditions within the camps was often cited as a reason for the ill-treatment of other prisoners. As the

78 Record of the main hearing in the case of Jan P., 14 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 420.

79 Henryk Korotyński, "Echa w sprawie Zenktelera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jun. 1947; "Winien czy nie winien? Sprawa doktora Zenktelera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947; Roman Frister, "W sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Aug. 1948.

80 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251; Cassation appeal by the prosecutor at the District Court in Kraków filed with the SN Criminal Chamber (Centre for Field Sessions), 4 May 1949, AAN, SN 2/9251.

81 Record of the suspect interrogation of Feliks W., 6 Jul. 1945, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Krakowie 262.

82 Record of the main hearing in the case of Józef Koł., District Court in Ostrów Wielkopolski, 22 Nov. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33.

grounds of the judgement in the case of Jan P. stated: "If we consider that every human being has the urge to preserve his own life […] and if we consider that the Stutthof concentration camp was a so-called extermination camp and that the prisoners were well aware of this, the court concludes that certain degenerate acts, certain deviations from the norm as understood by a person at liberty, were justified, and they were justified to the extent that although a person at liberty would see them as crimes under the Criminal Code, under camp conditions they were seen as legitimate states of necessity."[83] Similarly, former camp comrades testifying on behalf of another Stutthof prisoner, Józef K., argued that if the accused had ever abused inmates, then this was due to "frayed nerves and the continual struggle for survival".[84] The assumption was that not everyone could be a hero and, whilst strong personalities were to be lauded, it was also necessary to show understanding towards weaker individuals. The court, in granting a pardon to Józef K., wrote:

> Each day in the camp was a battle to stay alive. Individuals of strong character were able, under any circumstances, even in the depths of human misery, to behave with dignity and to give succour to their comrades in captivity. Those of a weaker disposition, however, in those difficult moments, often when fighting to save their own life or to secure less onerous work, would fall apart, forgetting that their gain was someone else's loss. The court regards Józef K. to be one of those weaker individuals. This man, having spent more than two years in the camp, has essentially become a human wreck as far as his mental state is concerned; to some extent, the same could be said of his physical state.[85]

Witnesses, and also judges, often used a different yardstick to measure the conduct of Polish prisoner functionaries compared to that of foreign, especially German, prisoner functionaries. Whereas the malicious intentions of the Germans and of the *Volksdeutsche* in general were assumed from the outset, attempts were made to excuse the behaviour of Poles in various ways. In a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie*, Albin Mazurkiewicz wrote that although all the prisoner functionaries in Auschwitz administered beatings, only the Germans were guilty of excesses: "There were exceptionally few cases of inmates being abused by camp officials of other nationalities."[86] Similarly, in the trial of Jan P., one of the

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83 Judgment in the case of John P., Jozef R., Wacław K., Kazimierz K., Wanda K., Gerda S., Elżbieta B., Ewa P., Jenny-Wanda B., Aleksy D., Franciszek Sz., Tadeusz K., Jan P., Jan B., Erna B., staff members and prisoners of Stutthof, 31 May 1946, AIPN, SSK w Gdańsku 423.

84 Declaration of the Executive Board of the Białystok Branch of the PZbWP, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Białymstoku 141.

85 Opinion regarding the pardon of Józef K. District Court in Białystok in closed session, 13 Mar. 1948, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Białymstoku 141.

86 Mazurkiewicz [letter], "Jeszcze w sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*,

witnesses testified: "We preferred to be beaten by the Poles than by the SS or *Kapos* of other nationalities. The Poles were less violent or would just pretend to beat you. In the Stutthof camp, Poles gained the upper hand, which enabled many of their compatriots to survive."[87]

These observations may be partly correct. Indeed, in the first years of the war in particular, the SS often appointed German convicts to positions of authority within the concentration camps, choosing individuals known for their exceptional brutality. In all likelihood there was a degree of national solidarity within the camps, too. Nevertheless, the statements cited above seem to oversimplify the issue. Such stereotyping sometimes affected sentencing: the same acts perpetrated by a German, by a Pole, or by prisoner of a different nationality, would in one instance be interpreted as proof of sadism or "Pole-baiting" and in another as evidence of a higher need or mental breakdown.[88]

The patriotism of the accused could also be employed as a rationale for assessing their conduct in a more favourable light. Thus, for instance, the fact that Zenkteller, despite alleged pressure from the SS, had not signed the German People's List (*Deutsche Volksliste*)[89] was a strong argument in his favour for both the court and witnesses alike. Zenkteller's participation in the Wielkopolska Uprising was also emphasised. Almost all the witnesses concurred that the accused had beaten inmates. However, his earlier patriotism was seen as proof that he had not been driven by sadism. The accused was assumed to be of sound character. It was also assumed that a readiness to die for one's country was synonymous with a generally humanitarian attitude towards other people, irrespective of their race, nationality, or political convictions. Nevertheless, patriotism was not always regarded as a sufficient reason for acquittal. Józef Koł.'s participation in the Wielkopolska Uprising did not save him from execution, despite the fact that the defence counsel cited this fact in his appeal to the Supreme Court.[90]

During the period when Roman Zenkteller was the senior prisoner functionary at the camp hospital, in other words from March to December 1944, only Jewish prisoners underwent selection at Birkenau.[91] The question arises as to whether

1-15 Sep. 1948.

87 Record of the main hearing in the case of Jan P., 24 Sep. 1945, AIPN, SSK Gdańsk 420.

88 Indictment against Fryderyk P., 28 Aug. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Szczecinie.

89 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251; Andrzej Kobyłecki, "Sprawa doktora Zengtelera", *Wolni Ludzie*, 20 May 1947; Eugeniusz Zatorski [letter], "Jeszcze w sprawie Zenktellera. Dyskusja trwa...", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Sep. 1948.

90 Cassation appeal in the case of Józef Koł., 20 Dec. 1947, AIPN, Sąd Okr. w Ostrowie Wielkopolskim 33.

91 During one of the last selections conducted in Section BIIf of the hospital, on 16 October 1944, 600 Jewish prisoners were sent to their deaths. See: *Auschwitz 1940-1945. Central*

the court's lenient treatment of the accused was also linked to the fact that his actions had affected Jews more than they had Poles. That such instances of court bias did occur is shown by Andrzej Rzepliński's analysis of the case files in the trials concerning the Jedwabne pogrom of July 1941, which took place in Poland in 1948-1950 and 1953-1954. Rzepliński states that the courts had been guided "not by the need to see justice done, but by an unwillingness to give satisfaction to the victims".[92] It is difficult to verify this assumption in the Zenkteller case as the records of the trial have been lost. In the grounds of its judgement, however, the court stressed that one of the defence witnesses was a Jew, which may suggest that the court was fearful of being accused of bias.[93]

In the debate on the trials of prisoner functionaries, it was often emphasised that offences committed within the camps should not be measured by the same yardstick as offences committed in normal life. We encounter this argument in, for instance, Jerzy Andrzejewski's novel *Ashes and Diamonds*. One of the final scenes involves a conversation between the main protagonist, Podgórski, a party activist, and his old friend and superior, Judge Kossecki. During the meeting, Kossecki delivers a speech in his own defence, in which he tries to justify his misdeeds during his time in a concentration camp and to convince Podgórski not to denounce him. It is worth citing here a longer excerpt of the text, for although Andrzejewski himself never spent time in a concentration camp and did not belong to the ex-prisoner community, it illustrates one of the key elements of the dispute over the conduct of prisoner functionaries. "War [said Kossecki] brings out all kinds of instincts in men. Some it turns into heroes, others into criminals. But now the war is over. There is no war, and now we've got back to normal human relationships, now that there is no rape or cruelty, now that people are no longer imprisoned in camps or subjected to torture or forced to torture others, it's the time for new, normal estimates of society." The judge continued:

> Certain people broke down in one way or another during the war. They couldn't endure the nightmare. [...] But is that to mean that under normal conditions many of these people cannot become honest and useful citizens again? Do you think that X, who stole from his friends in a camp, will go on stealing now that he has returned to his job and is no longer hungry? Or that Y, who became a passive tool in the hands of criminals, will now be a monster to society? [...] Of course, I've made a number of grave mistakes. But do you think I'm any different now from before? That I can't go on being the useful and respected individual I was before the war? [...] Suppose I am sentenced. What of it? [...] Some dozens of people, who knew me well, will say:

Issues in the History of the Camp, edited by Wacław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, Vol. 2, Oświęcim 2000, p. 326.

92 Andrzej Rzepliński, "Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej?", p. 458.

93 Judgment in the case of Roman Zenkteller, District Court in Kraków, VII Criminal Division, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, SN 2/9251.

> If such a man can stoop so low, what can be expected from others? I assure you it won't be an elevating trial. And it won't help anyone strengthen his or her belief in mankind.[94]

In the end, Podgórski is persuaded by Kossecki and allows the judge to leave.

This ending to the novel, although it undoubtedly met with the approval of many former prisoners, also provoked protest and indignation. Krystyna Wigura, for instance, in a text published in the spring of 1948 in *Wolni Ludzie*, expressed the view that concentration camp prisoners should be judged according to the same criteria as others, and that truly decent people managed to behave properly, even in captivity. The author rejected the argument used by the hero of Andrzejewski's novel that it was the inhuman conditions of the camps that turned inmates into criminals, and that in normal life they could prove to be good citizens. In Wigura's view, a person who had once committed similar crimes would have no qualms about committing lesser offences in normal life. She also warned that the non-punishment of war criminals would lead to the relativisation of crimes. If every decent human being was to be seen as a hero, she argued, then the moral turpitude of the camps would cease to be regarded as something evil because, after all, one cannot expect everyone to be a hero. Meanwhile, in the camps, "a person with a moral backbone would not even entertain the thought that he could compromise his principles to save his own life". These deliberations led Wigura to the conclusion that people such as Kossecki should be severely punished. "There are ongoing court cases," she wrote, "concerning people who did not emerge victorious from the 'trial by fire'. What is more, many of those people are not even undergoing rehabilitation. Why? In the camps we warned them that their conduct would not go unpunished. Yet now—when we see that they have returned to normal life, that they are useful citizens—we are all too willing to forget. We say: 'Oh, what the hell!', and we let them get off scot free, just as Podgórski did under pressure from Kossecki."[95]

Although many former camp inmates stood in defence of their accused comrades, the picture that emerges from this polemic—of relationships governed by brutality, corruption, and indifference—is very different from the way in which those relationships were presented by the most widely-read authors of camp memoirs—Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Seweryna Szmaglewska or Krystyna Żywulska.[96] And although the moral assessment of prisoner conduct was not always as devastating as Tadeusz Borowski's, it was precisely the press articles and witness

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94 Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Popiół i diament*, Warszawa 1948 (first edition), pp. 329-330.

95 Krystyna Wigura, "Sprawa Kosseckiego. Na marginesie powieści Andrzejewskiego 'Popiół i diament'", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-30 Apr. 1948.

96 Kossak-Szczucka, *Z otchłani*; Seweryna Szmaglewska, *Dymy nad Birkenau*, Warszawa 1945; Krystyna Żywulska, *Przeżyłam Oświęcim*, Warszawa 1946.

statements intended to defend the accused that often revealed—in a far more meaningful way than the accusations directed against them—the brutality of camp life, since they exposed the inadequacy of generally accepted moral and legal norms in describing the reality of the camps.

Beyond the Courtroom

Aside from articles directly concerning the trials of prisoner functionaries, *Wolni Ludzie*, as well as other newspapers and magazines, published texts which tackled more broadly the problem of the conduct of concentration camp prisoners and their entanglement in the system of terror. The biggest debate was sparked by the Auschwitz stories of Tadeusz Borowski and his polemic against Zofia Kossak-Szczucka.[97]

Borowski's very first short stories, which appeared in April 1946 in *Twórczość* [Creativity], gave rise to controversy.[98] Even the editors of the monthly distanced themselves from the published texts. In a note that preceded the two short stories, the editors wrote that although the authors—initially, the story entitled *The Sosnowiec-Będzin Transport* had been wrongly attributed to Borowski's friend, Krystyn Olszewski—had rightly shown that the whole purpose of the system of Nazi crimes had been "to turn its victims into accomplices", they lamented the fact that the works lacked explicit moral judgement and a "categorical rejection of evil".[99] If, despite this, the editorial board of *Twórczość* had decided to publish the works, it was, argued the editors, in order to "confront Nazi criminals with an indictment full of naturalistic horror; an indictment which reveals the plague of evil that was implanted in the soul of the victims". Several critical reviews of Borowski's stories appeared over the following months, but it was the young author's attack on Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's *From the Abyss* that truly

97 For more on the subject of the polemic surrounding Tadeusz Borowski's prose see: Tadeusz Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata (O Tadeuszu Borowskim)*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 132-138; Dmitrów, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków*, pp. 115-126; Andrzej Werner, Foreword to Borowski, *Utwory wybrane*. Another attempt to convey the essence and the roots of the conflict between Borowski and Kossak in the context of the contemporaneous Polish war literature is: Dariusz Kulesza, *Dwie prawdy. Zofia Kossak i Tadeusz Borowski wobec obrazu wojny w polskiej prozie lat 1944-1948*, Białystok 2006.

98 *Twórczość* 4 (1946): Tadeusz Borowski, "Dzień na Harmenzach" ("A Day at Harmenz"); Krystyn Olszewski (in reality also Borowski), "Transport Sosnowiec-Będzin" (the subsequent title of this short story was "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen").

99 Editors' note, *Twórczość* 4 (1946), p. 42.

caused a storm. Those who stood up in defence of Kossak-Szczucka were, first and foremost, writers from Catholic journals. Shortly after the review appeared, *Dziś i Jutro* [Today and Tomorrow] published "An Open Letter to the Executive Board of the Professional Union of Polish Writers (ZZLP)", in which it demanded that Borowski be put before a peer tribunal.[100] The Catholic writer and journalist Paweł Jasienica also rose to Kossak-Szczucka's defence. In a piece for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, he described Borowski's text as indecent. By accusing Kossak-Szczucka and other Auschwitz inmates of unethical behaviour, Jasienica argued, Borowski had relativized the crimes of the SS. Jasienica likened Borowski to other Marxist writers, who, he believed, had unjustly accused the Poles of showing a lack of solidarity during the war.[101] The debate over the polemic between Borowski and Kossak-Szczucka soon developed into an assault on the literary output of the author of "A Day in Harmenza". Borowski was not spared *ad personam* attacks either, his detractors accusing him of having behaved immorally whilst in Auschwitz. "We know that in the camps there were many so-called 'organisers' from amongst whom the *Kapos*, block seniors, and camp hyenas were recruited," wrote S. Poszumski in *Słowo Powszechne* [Universal Word]. "They all survived the camps and will see justice done, for in a few weeks' time a great trial will take place at the very location where their crimes were committed.[102] But they have enough good sense, or perhaps decency, to desist from writing their camp memoirs."[103]

In the meantime, Borowski's former camp comrades came to his defence. Henryk Korotyński accused Poszumski—one of Borowski's most vehement critics—of ignorance and cheap sententiousness. He argued that the prisoner community had been a stratified caricature of the class system; it had comprised an "aristocracy", which included high-ranking camp inmates but also long-serving ones; a "bourgeoisie", which enriched itself from barter; a "petite bourgeoisie", which included lower-ranking prisoner functionaries, camp craftsmen and traders, as well as inmates who received parcels from home; and finally a "proletariat", the most ill-treated group, which had no hope of survival. It is not true, wrote Korotyński, that Auschwitz signified nothing more than "work, hunger, suffering, and death". Members of the camp elite, but also the middle classes, could

100 "List otwarty do Zarządu Głównego ZZLP", *Dziś i Jutro* 6 (1947). Cited after: Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata*, p. 133.

101 Paweł Jasienica, "Warto pogadać", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 2 Mar. 1947.

102 Perhaps the author was thinking of the trial of the Auschwitz staff, which was held in Kraków on 24 November–16 December 1947, though prisoner functionaries were not among the accused in this trial.

103 S. Poszumski, "Fałsz, cynizm, krzywda... Wspomnienia z obozu godzące w godność więźnia i męczennika", *Słowo Powszechne*, 14 Jun. 1947. Quoted after: Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata*, p. 134.

lead a "normal" life in which there was room for "love and debauchery, heroism and cowardice, politics and business, friendship and patronage, as well as creative activity, sports matches, and games of bridge".[104] The concentration camp nurtured widespread indifference to the suffering of others. This was a necessary defensive response to the surrounding horror: "We defended ourselves in various ways: by playing football; by not wearing sackcloth and ashes; by not pulling out our hair in despair every time a comrade died or was gassed. There, Sir, in Auschwitz (Korotyński addressed Poszumski), death was our daily bread, and a pile of naked, skeletal corpses our daily spectacle. There would not have been enough ashes, or tears, or strength, to feel compassion and despair." Korotyński also lamented the fact that the accounts of camp life published in Poland were dominated by the martyrological approach, according to which prisoners were presented solely as innocent victims or heroes; few authors touched on the problem of the moral bankruptcy caused by incarceration. Korotyński attributed this to the fear of relativizing Nazi crimes and profaning the memory of the victims. He believed these objections to be unfounded, however, since it was the system of terror created by the Nazis that had caused the depravity, and this could be used as an additional argument by the prosecution. Referring to the trials of prisoner functionaries which were taking place at that time, Korotyński also expressed concern that "if the judges are not aware of the full truth of the concentration camps", misdeeds committed within the camps will be unjustly measured "by the yardstick of people at liberty".

Paweł Jasienica, having read the stories Borowski had sent him, changed his opinion about the author. In an article entitled "Confession of the Tormented", which appeared in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Jasienica withdrew the earlier comments he had made about Borowski. There exist, he wrote, two truths about Auschwitz. The first is a story of resistance, sacrifice, and heroism; it concerns some of the victims, perhaps even a significant number. But then there is the second truth, which concerns most of the victims; this is the truth about depravity caused by the conditions within the camps. Borowski, claimed Jasienica, by writing in the first person, showed remarkable moral courage. Even if he was describing his own transgressions, who would dare to condemn him for it? "He could have done the usual thing and taken a comfortable, well-trodden path. Quite simply, having left the camp, he could have put on the ever-fashionable jacket of martyrdom, signed up to various associations, and pinned medals to his chest. But Borowski refuses to do this; instead, he confesses to what he did in the camp."[105] In Jasienica's view, Borowski's conflict with public opinion stemmed from the fact that his writing

104 Henryk Korotyński, "Kiedy będziemy znali Oświęcim?", *Odrodzenie*, 24 Aug. 1947.
105 Paweł Jasienica, "Spowiedź udręczonych", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 Oct. 1947.

unwittingly aroused in his readers "a sense of responsibility for what had happened".

The problem of the stratification of the camp community and the lack of solidarity among prisoners was also tackled outside the context of Borowski's work. Many authors were troubled by the question of why some inmates had completely lost their moral compass within the camps while others had remained loyal to the basic imperatives of human solidarity and had sometimes even displayed remarkable heroism. A wide range of explanations was offered. At the two, ostensibly opposing extremes were the national interpretation and the Marxist interpretation; between these, however, was a vast array of approaches to the problem.

The most straightforward and convenient explanation, as proposed by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, among others, was that different national groups behaved in different ways. Although Kossak-Szczucka admitted that the conditions in Birkenau killed off any spirit of camaraderie, and that the urge for self-preservation had made people "predatory and ruthless", she also claimed that three fundamental differences in the conduct of different nationalities could be identified.[106] Describing the various groups of women prisoners, Kossak-Szczucka wrote that the Poles "had the reputation within the camps of being the most spiritually resilient"[107] and that they remained loyal and dignified to the end. The nastiest and most corrupt group were the German inmates, mostly convicts and prostitutes. Jewish women prisoners were supposedly characterised by passivity and disunity; it was from amongst them, claimed Kossak-Szczucka, that the majority of prisoner functionaries were recruited. Jewish women were also distinguished by their particular cruelty, even towards their own compatriots.

Such categorisation along national lines was challenged not only by Tadeusz Borowski but also by other authors. Among them was the writer Stanisław Wygodzki, a friend of Borowski's. Wygodzki had been transported to Birkenau from the ghetto in Będzin. That Wygodzki was a Jew, and thus in all likelihood would have found himself on the bottom rung of the social ladder in Birkenau, perhaps sharpened his view of the relations between prisoners. In his camp memoir published in *Wolni Ludzie*, he emphasised that the division between perpetrators and victims had not run along national lines, and that no nation had been immune to the evil which prevailed at Birkenau. Nor did he exempt the Jews from his harsh assessment. "On the one hand," he wrote, "there were victims of various nationalities (mostly Jews), speaking various languages, perishing together; on the other, there were perpetrators of various nationalities, speaking various languages, and doing one and the same thing: murdering people. Between them stood the *Kapo* and the *Vorarbeiter*, speaking various languages, and doing the same thing

106 Kossak-Szczucka, *Z otchłani*, pp. 80, 140-149.
107 Ibid., p. 149.

regardless of whether they were from Berlin, Rome, Thessaloniki, Budapest, Warsaw or Kaunas: robbing the prisoners and organising lard, vodka and tobacco for themselves and their masters."[108]Andrzej Kobyłecki, the editor-in-chief of *Wolni Ludzie*, also warned against making generalisations about the conduct of national groups within the concentration camps:

> We have involuntarily inherited from our oppressors […] a certain system of generalisation, a certain understanding of collective responsibility. How often we hear people say, seemingly with utter conviction, that in the concentration camps the Russians were united and ruthless; the French aloof; the Italians thieving; the Jews cowardly and dirty; the Serbs slovenly; the Greeks deceitful and fearful; the Germans thuggish; and the Poles…the Poles were all very different.[109]

Kobyłecki attributed this simplified view of reality, first, to the Nazi-imposed system of thinking in racial and national categories and, second, to the plain fact that Polish prisoners knew their compatriots best, whereas other groups of inmates appeared to them as an homogenous mass.

Another popular criterion used to explain the differences in the conduct of concentration camp prisoners was religious faith. This theme appears in numerous camp memoirs and scholarly works, particularly those dealing with the fate of Catholic priests. The writer Gustaw Morcinek, a Silesian activist and inmate of Sachsenhausen and Dachau, claimed in an article, albeit for *Wolni Ludzie*, that the experience of the camps had debased perpetrators and victims alike: "The camp inmate often became, as a result of his suffering, the same beast as his Nazi oppressor. He became as cruel as his own executioner. He murdered his comrades in a cold, calculated manner. He savoured their suffering and sought out new forms of torture."[110] And yet, continued Morcinek, in the concentration camps one also encountered great kindness and humanity. Not everyone was debased by the camp experience; for some, it was a kind of "catharsis", from which they emerged "morally cleansed" and "even stronger" than before. Everything depended, in Morcinek's view, on a person's spiritual strength and faith in transcendental values.

That these two interpretations, the religious and the national, were closely linked is best illustrated by Kossak-Szczucka's memoir. Whereas in the text cited above Morcinek did not specify which religion he had in mind, the author of *From the Abyss* left her readers in no doubt that only Christianity could impart the necessary strength to survive the camps without losing integrity. According to Kossak-Szczucka, "a *Häftling* (inmate) who accepted the concentration camp as

108 Stanisław Wygodzki, "Kaufering—Obóz II", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jul. 1947.

109 Andrzej Kobyłecki, "O świat dobrego człowieka (artykuł dyskusyjny)", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 May 1948.

110 Gustaw Morcinek, "Człowiek w obozie", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 May 1947.

an act of divine retribution, who was filled with Christian resignation, was able to take on this momentous test, this final lonely battle for the greatest good: his own soul".[111] "The strength which allowed Polish women prisoners to remain dignified" was also, she believed, "the prayer of friends"[112] "Not every woman received parcels, but for each woman fervent prayers were said by those on the outside; by her children, husband, family, friends, and relatives. [...] The power of this prayer meant that although Polish women died in equally great numbers as other women, they generally maintained their humanity till the end." Whereas, according to Kossak-Szczucka, Jewish women prisoners were paralysed with fear and lacked the courage even to give water to their compatriots who had been condemned to death, Polish women, when summoned by their compatriots in the name of Christ, heroically performed the last offices despite the risk to their own lives. Such assistance had no practical significance and did not justify the risk, but it nonetheless eased the conscience: "They cried: 'In the name of Christ!'. Who could have been deaf to that?"[113]

Many authors also attributed a victim's spiritual strength or weakness to his or her class background, although they evaluated the conduct of each social class very differently. Thus, for instance, Kossak-Szczucka suggested that the intelligentsia endured the conditions of the camps better than other social classes. "The remarkable dynamism of the Polish intelligentsia, embracing life even amongst the ruins and bunkers," wrote the author of *From the Abyss*, "did not give them [the Polish women political prisoners in Auschwitz] a moment's rest. So long as their spirit lingered, they wished to be useful; they wanted to feel as if they were still fighting on the front."[114] The opposite view was taken by Stanisław Nogaj, who, in his Gusen memoir, stressed that class background and education had no impact at all on the conduct of prisoners. In Gusen, he wrote, everyone stole: "the renowned political activist; the duke, the count, and the worker; the priest, the dean, and the canon; the professor and the colonel".[115] Nor did it matter, claimed Nogaj, whether someone had been sent to the camp as a convict or a political prisoner: there were criminals to be found within every category of inmate.

The debate over who was particularly prone to collaboration with the Nazis had strong political overtones. Indeed, it is no accident that in Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Ashes and Diamonds*, the protagonist Kossecki, a former block senior in Gross-Rosen, turns out to be a pre-war lawyer, a provincial judge, who made his

111 Kossak-Szczucka, *Z otchłani*, p. 154.
112 Ibid., pp. 148-149.
113 Ibid., pp. 115-116.
114 Ibid., p. 152.
115 Nogaj, *Gusen*, p. 38.

career during the *Sanacja*.[116] Arrested probably for his cooperation with the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ) or the Home Army (AK), in the concentration camp this widely respected citizen turns out to be a person without moral backbone, who, in order to save his own life, is capable of the greatest cruelty. In subsequent editions of the novel, these ideological overtones of Kossecki's past were successively given greater prominence. In the first version of *Ashes and Diamonds*, which was serialised in *Odrodzenie*, Judge Kossecki is portrayed merely as one of many who failed to emerge from the war with their honour intact: "How disgusting! It makes you want to vomit," exclaims Podgórski, having learned about Kossecki's past. "Don't exaggerate, my friend," replies Szczuka, Kossecki's former camp comrade. "You would have had to do the same."[117] When the novel was first published in book form in 1948, the author changed the final sentence of the dialogue: "Don't exaggerate, my friend," says Szczuka. "It's simply the bankruptcy of a certain type of mentality…."[118]

This theme was taken up by Jerzy Putrament. Referring in an article to *Ashes and Diamonds*, he wrote that Andrzejewski, by introducing the character of Judge Kossecki, had raised the very important issue of society's attempts to come to terms with the Second World War. Putrament criticised Andrzejewski, however, for wrongly attributing Kossecki's behaviour to his bourgeois origins. "The worker and the peasant were just as capable of butchering their fellow inmates." But in rebuking the winner of *Odrodzenie*'s literary prize for his excessive dogmatism, Putrament showed himself to be even more orthodox. Developing his argument, he wrote:

> The worker, devoid of values, lacking in class consciousness and possessed by false beliefs, and having witnessed the break-up of his party, served Hitler just as the peasant and the bourgeois did. The advantage the worker has over the bourgeois is that his class interest coincides with the interest of the (given) nation, whereas at times the opposite is true of the bourgeois. A prisoner's ideological awakening, his class consciousness, would seem to be significant.[119]

Tadeusz Borowski's series of Auschwitz stories entitled *Farewell to Maria*, published at the end of 1947, provoked similar reflection.[120] In the first, eponymous

116 The period between 1926 and 1939, for most of which Poland was under the authoritarian rule of Marshal Piłsudski.

117 Jerzy Andrzejewski, "Zaraz po wojnie" (12), *Odrodzenie*, 20 Apr. 1947. Cf. also: Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Asche und Diamant*, edited by Andreas Lawaty and Wolfram Schäfer, 1984, p. 392.

118 Andrzejewski, *Popiół i diament*, Warszawa 1948, p. 143. In the 1954 Polish edition of *Ashes and Diamonds*, the author is very explicit that the "bankruptcy of the petit bourgeois" is meant (*Popiół i diament*, Warszawa 1954, p. 129).

119 Jerzy Putrament, "Notatki o Oświęcimiu", *Odrodzenie*, 6 Jun. 1948.

120 Tadeusz Borowski, *Pożegnanie z Marią*, Warszawa 1948 (postdated). See: Borowski, *Pisma (Proza)*, p. 411.

story Borowski describes the life of the Warsaw intelligentsia during the occupation. In subsequent stories, the main protagonist, Tadeusz, having been incarcerated in a camp, proves to be, despite his education and poetic nature, just as ruthless and insensitive to the suffering of others as his lower-class comrades. The writer Paweł Jasienica drew attention to this. In a review published in July 1948 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, he noted that Borowski's stories had an ideological message, for their structure suggested that Borowski blamed the reality of the camps on the bourgeoisie, who had apparently been the most prone to depravity. Jasienica felt this was an unfair assessment. The camps, he claimed, had depraved people regardless of their class background:

> Germany became a criminal state not because its citizens were guilty of bourgeois thinking but because the German nation was taken over by a desire for world domination. And every person who surrenders to that desire will be forced to behave just as the Germans did. [...] Whoever wants to protect the world from the hell of the concentration camps must defeat tyranny and totalitarianism, not the bourgeoisie."[121]

Aside from this ideological dispute, attempts were made to explore the psychology of prisoner perpetrators and to understand the mechanism of depravity. Of particular note in this regard is a story by Juliusz Kydryński, published in the spring of 1945 in *Odrodzenie*. The author describes the fortunes of a young *Kapo* from Auschwitz, who, having murdered his school friend, suddenly becomes aware of his own debasement and decides to commit suicide by throwing himself against the electric barbed wire:

> The *Kapo* was 19 years old and profoundly aware of his own insignificance. But he had only reached this conclusion the previous day, when he had started to think about it. Before that, for those two years, he had lived as if in a trance, distinguishing neither dreams from wakefulness nor feverish fictions from reality. [...] Unaware of the complexes that life in the camp had produced within him, he thought it entirely natural that, having previously endured the most deserving punishments, coupled with terrible beatings—punches to the head, kicks to the stomach, the use of auxiliary implements—now he had the right to administer those very same beatings. And so, with the most perfect mindlessness and primordial cruelty, he tortured his comrades. The mentality of the hunted, baited animal, which quivers before the strong and kills the weak, found flawless expression within him."[122]

A very similar pattern emerges from a fictionalised memoir reprinted in *Wolni Ludzie* in 1947.[123] The hero is a 10-year-old Jewish boy nicknamed Bubi, who, having been saved from death by an SS officer in Treblinka, is later transferred with the officer to Majdanek. There, he becomes an errand boy for the camp

121 Paweł Jasienica, "Którędy wyjście?", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 11 Jul. 1948.

122 Juliusz Kydryński, "Biała noc", *Odrodzenie*, 1 Apr. 1945.

123 "Bubi (Historia prawdziwa)", A.K., *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Sep. 1947.

senior. Completely desensitised, Bubi mistreats the other prisoners. The culminating point comes when a man he is beating turns out to be his father. In contrast to the previous story, in this one there is no moment of "repentance". And unlike other stories and memoirs that deal with the subject of prisoner functionaries, here the protagonist is portrayed not as a sadist intoxicated by the suffering of others but rather as a victim of the Nazi system of depravity. His innocence is emphasised not only by his young age but also by his tragic death in the mass execution of Jewish prisoners in Majdanek. His debasement is entirely blamed on the SS.

Defending the Image of the Political Prisoner

As the preceding chapter showed, the stratification of the prisoner community and the entanglement of victims in the system of terror was not a taboo subject in Poland in the immediate post-war years. Why, then, was the topic given such scant attention in fiction and in memoirs, and why did Borowski's works cause such public outrage?

It is true that Borowski posed the question about the depravity and lack of solidarity among victims of Nazism in a manner that was both forthright and mature in literary terms. Notwithstanding the criticisms made by certain reviewers, the author of "A Day in Harmenza" and "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen" could hardly have been accused of nihilism. On the contrary, his moral judgements were uncompromising. Borowski's accusations were directed not only at the camp elite, the highest-ranking prisoner functionaries, camp seniors, block seniors, *Kapos*, and camp plutocrats, but also at the prisoner "upper middle class", to which he himself belonged.[124] He was not interested in the extreme cases of prisoners murdering or abusing their comrades. The protagonists of Borowski's stories usually behave in accordance with the unwritten law of the camps, but when viewed from the outside they appear as egotistical, ruthless, and indifferent to the suffering of others. And, as Paweł Jasienica correctly noted, by writing in the first person Borowski forced the reader to identify with the "evil-ridden" heroes of his stories.

However, there is another explanation for the reaction provoked by Borowski's works. The participants in the courtroom controversies that arose during the trials of prisoner functionaries were almost exclusively former prisoners. Likewise, the articles published in *Wolni Ludzie* were primarily meant for the ex-prisoner community. Borowski's stories, on the other hand, were addressed to a wider public. In other words, the author of "Among us, in Auschwitz" brought his vision of life in the camps to a readership that existed beyond the inner circle of survi-

124 Werner, *Zwyczajna apokalipsa*, p. 123.

vors. Things that were familiar to Auschwitz inmates, wrote Henryk Korotyński of Borowski's works, the outside world reacted to with astonishment and even indignation.[125] Former prisoners were worried that Borowski's confessions might be misunderstood by society at large and could damage the image of the PZbWP and its members. *Wolni Ludzie* did not discuss Borowski at all; even an article by Korotyński that was reprinted in the magazine had all references to the author cut.[126] In the summer of 1948, following the publication of *Farewell to Maria*, only a brief review of the book appeared in *Wolni Ludzie*. The reviewer did not enter into a polemic with Borowski; instead, he merely expressed concern that the book might be confusing for readers uninitiated in the realities of camp life.[127]

Shortly after the war there were fears that the truth about the relations between concentration camp prisoners could discredit the Poles, who, aside from the Jews, often constituted the biggest group of victims. Many who had been in a camp for several years had managed to secure a privileged position. In April 1945, Jerzy Kornacki, a member of the newly-appointed Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Auschwitz, who had witnessed some of the interviews with former prisoners then taking place, wrote:

> It's all coming out—the wildly extravagant eating and drinking and debauched lifestyle of some prisoners, and the misery and torment of others; the conspiracy amongst the long-term inmates against the waves of new arrivals; the cosy alliance between the SS and the prisoners in so-called Kanada; the disgusting, often contemptible behaviour of the intelligentsia from all corners of Europe—it's a quagmire; it's enough to make the angels weep. All the remaining days of my life seem contaminated.[128]

Later that month, Kornacki sent a memo to Prime Minister Osóbka-Morawski in which he stated that "amongst the foreign prisoners, particularly the Jews and the French and Belgian communists", one notices "a strong anti-Polish feeling bordering on outright hatred towards Poland. I dare say that soon we shall witness the emergence of an anti-Polish organisation of foreign ex-prisoners, who will not hesitate to make shameful accusations against Poles and Poland on the international arena."[129] Consequently, the author proposed to co-opt into the commission two former Auschwitz prisoners: the former Reichstag deputy Artur Mayer, a German Jew, and Doctor Otto Wolken, an Austrian Jew. In this way, Kornacki believed, the report produced by the commission would have more credibility in the eyes of the international community.

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125 Henryk Korotyński, "Kiedy będziemy znali Oświęcim?", *Odrodzenie*, 24 Aug. 1947.

126 Henryk Korotyński, "O 'całą prawdę' o Oświęcimiu", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Sep. 1947.

127 "T. Borowski, 'Pożegnanie z Marią'" (MEWA), *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Jun. 1948.

128 Quoted after: Zofia Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1945-1954*, compiled by Hanna Kirchner, Part I, Warszawa 2000, p. 58 (note).

129 Memorandum of parliamentary deputy Jerzy Kornacki regarding the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Auschwitz, 28 Apr. 1945, AAN, URM 5/11.

In a letter sent to reassure Osóbka-Morawski, the then Minister of Art and Culture, Edmund Zalewski, wrote that the Auschwitz Commission included the director of the Central Jewish Historical Commission, Filip Friedman, the chairman of the Kraków Jewish Committee, Leon Kupferberg, as well as Zofia Nałkowska, Ksawery Dunikowski, and several professors of the Jagiellonian University, which would guarantee the commission's international recognition. Foreigners were also interviewed by the commission. In the course of the research, however, wrote Zalewski, "the disgraceful behaviour of various high-ranking prisoner functionaries—Poles as well as Germans and Jews—has been revealed on several occasions. The accounts concerning the activities of the Silesians are particularly gruesome. It is difficult to say with certainty whether this will lead to the institutional hatred of Poland by foreign communists and Jews. But even if this were to happen, the many recognised acts of heroism by Poles on behalf of foreigners in the camps will definitely undermine any generalisations in this regard."[130] Despite this, Mayer and Wolken were co-opted into the commission.[131]

Interrogation of former Auschwitz inmate Otto Wolken by members of the Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Auschwitz, Kraków, 24 April 1945. On the right, at the table, Zofia Nałkowska (courtesy of APMAB).

130 Official letter from the Minister of Art and Culture to the Prime Minister, Edward Osóbka-Morawski, 23 May 1945, AAN, URM 5/11.

131 Minutes of the first meeting of the GKBZNwP, 9 May 1945. Cited after: *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce i jej oddziały terenowe w 1945 roku*, pp. 20-22.

Influenced by the spate of trials of prisoner functionaries and numerous publications describing relations within the camps, two years later the PZbWP leadership once again debated the image of the political prisoner. This time, however, the focus was on score-settling within Poland rather than on international issues. The first voices of disquiet were heard between the summer and autumn of 1947. At the September meeting of the PZbWP's Supreme Council (RN), Ludwik Rajewski, the chairman of the association's Monitoring Committee, gave a speech in which he expressed concern that the recent proliferation of trials of prisoner functionaries, which were appearing like "mushrooms after rain", and the many publications inspired by those trials, could damage the good name of the association and its members.[132] Society, he believed, was not being properly informed about the conditions within Nazi concentration camps and might draw false conclusions from reading those publications. Furthermore, he claimed, the whole debate was grist to the mill of Western propaganda, which was trying to whitewash the Germans at the cost of others. We must not forget, he said, "that social coexistence within the camps was different", that "collective life was governed by the fear of hunger and death. That is why camp inmates must be judged by different standards." Other participants in the meeting shared the concern that the debate over the trials of prisoner functionaries could further undermine the association's standing. According to one speaker, the association was already barely tolerated by other public organisations. Consequently, the association's Supreme Council decided to take steps to restrict the public debate and to channel it in the appropriate direction. Rajewski suggested appointing a special commission that would draw up a declaration "on the truth about the concentration camps". As proposed by other participants in the meeting, the commission would also monitor the press debate on the subject of the camps and clarify any misunderstandings. It was also decided that the association should ask the Censorship Office to employ special PZbWP-appointed censors to monitor all films and publications about the camps. In addition, the participants resolved to call on members not to denounce their camp comrades directly to the public prosecutor's office but rather to notify a peer tribunal, which would determine whether to refer the matter to the courts.[133] At the same time, it was decided to carry out a purge within the ranks of the PZbWP and to exclude all persons whose conduct in captivity had been in any way suspect.In November 1947, a text by Ludwik Rajewski entitled "On the Truth about the Concentration Camps" appeared in *Wolni Ludzie*[134]; in it, Rajewski declared that, in light of the numerous trials of prisoner functionaries and the public debate

132 Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP, 28 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 4.

133 Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG PZbWP, 28 Aug. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 5; Minutes of the meeting of the RN PZbWP 5, 28 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 4.

134 Ludwik Rajewski, "O prawdę o obozach koncentracyjnych", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Nov. 1947.

surrounding them, the PZbWP had decided to put forward its own position. Next, the author presented the demands that had been formulated at the September meeting of the association's leadership. The article also made some preliminary remarks about relations within the camp community. Rajewski pointed out, among other things, that in creating the camp system the Nazis had consciously tried to "destroy the human soul". He also emphasised that many posts within the "prisoner self-administration" had been deliberately taken up by members of the resistance, thus helping to mitigate the camp regime. Consequently, Rajewski advised particular caution when considering the problem of prisoner functionaries.

Two months later, another PZbWP member, Jerzy Rawicz, published a text in *Robotnik* in which he argued that, contrary to the general public view, not every concentration camp prisoner had been a hero or a political activist, and not every prisoner had behaved with decency.[135] Rawicz divided prisoners into five categories: 1) members of the camp resistance; 2) non-affiliated prisoners whose conduct had been dignified; 3) prisoners who had mainly looked after themselves but without harming others; 4) prisoners who had tried to survive at any cost, even at the cost of others; and 5) prisoners who had been guilty of contemptible behaviour towards others, as well as *Volksdeutsche*, national traitors, and *Kapos*. According to Rawicz, people in the last two categories deserved to be roundly condemned. The issue of heroes and non-heroes among Polish prisoners, he wrote, had hitherto been unjustly ignored. But now was the time to dispel the myth that all prisoners had been heroes. It was necessary to expose "the infiltration of the association and the community by people who are not worthy of being called former political prisoners". Rawicz accordingly called on PZbWP members to disclose the names of former prisoners "who today occupy whatever position but who disgraced themselves when in captivity". Such cases were to be considered by the Chief Monitoring Committee and the names of the persons concerned to be published in *Wolni Ludzie*.

Neither Rajewski nor Rawicz tried to convince their readers that all prisoners had been heroes. On the contrary, as if to pre-empt the likely reaction, they admitted that the prisoner community also included people who had allowed themselves to be drawn into the system of terror. At the same time, however, both authors warned against making hasty generalisations. They emphasised that the conduct of prisoners had varied. Yet, by dividing prisoners into those who were decent and those who were worthy of condemnation, they avoided the fundamental problem, namely, that commonly accepted moral standards could not be applied to the reality of the camps. The interpretation of the camp experience adopted by Rajewski and Rawicz denied the possibility of ambivalent conduct, and those whom they

135 Jerzy Rawicz, "Nie wszyscy byli bohaterami", *Robotnik*, 20 Jan. 1948.

regarded as unworthy of the title of political prisoner were simply excluded from the prisoner community. By calling on PZbWP members to disclose the names of those suspected of collaboration with the Nazis to the association's leadership, and not to the public prosecutor's office, Rawicz implied that such matters should be taken care of by the prisoner community itself. In this way, the PZbWP tried to maintain its image of an organisation composed solely of irreproachable heroes of the fight against fascism.

The declarations of the PZbWP were followed up by specific measures. Although political vetting had taken place since the organisation's inception, in the summer of 1947 it intensified.[136] The purpose of the vetting campaign was, among others, to exclude from the association all those suspected of having "sullied the good name of political prisoners"[137] through their conduct in captivity. Other measures were also taken to bring the debate on the concentration camps under control. In the summer of 1948, the PZbWP's Executive Board issued a circular which stated that the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites (ROPWiM) had passed a resolution concerning the procedure for the erection of monuments, publication of books, and organisation of lectures on the subject of the Second World War.[138] According to this resolution, the Department for Museums and Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom at the Ministry of Art and Culture had to be notified of all proposed monuments and museums of martyrdom, and, following consultation with the ROPWiM, it would decide whether to allow their construction. This rule was also to apply to all publications and lectures concerning the war and occupation.

It is hard to judge to what extent the actions of the PZbWP aimed at restricting the debate on the conduct of concentration camp prisoners were inspired by the association's members and to what extent they were prompted by the state authorities. Separating these two centres of decision-making is further complicated by the fact that in the summer of 1947 the PZbWP's Executive Board carried out its first major political purges.

The efforts of the association, the ROPWiM, and the Ministry of Art and Culture did not immediately produce the anticipated results. The trials of prisoner functionaries were ongoing, and the conduct of concentration camp prisoners was still a subject of public debate. Tadeusz Borowski's *World of Stone* appeared at the end of 1947. However, the atmosphere of the debate on Poland's recent past

136 Circular no. 1 from the GKW to the executive boards of the PZbWP branches (Instructions for vetting members), 31 Jul. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28; Instruction for vetting committees of local groups and branches of the PZbWP, 1 Dec. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 28. Cf. also: Reports of the branch vetting committees, AAN, PZbWP 18.

137 Regulations of the GKW PZbWP, 21 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 28.

138 Circular from the ZG PZbWP no. 8/48, 9 Jul. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 14.

was slowly changing, and the war, wrote Tadeusz Drewnowski, "particularly in its general aspects, was becoming a legacy that needed to be overcome rather than exploited".[139] Borowski's final collection of Auschwitz stories met with fierce criticism. At the turn of 1948/1949, the number of publications devoted to the concentration camps significantly declined. The trials of prisoner functionaries no longer aroused the interest of the press. After the merger of veterans' and prisoners' organisations and the creation of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD), *Wolni Ludzie* was closed down and replaced by a new bi-weekly magazine—*Za Wolność i Lud* [For Freedom and the People]. In this new publication there was no place for coming to terms with the experiences of the Second World War. If the subject of the concentration camps was mentioned at all, it was exclusively in the context of stories about heroes of the anti-fascist resistance movement.[140]

The culminating point of this process was a text written by Tadeusz Borowski for *Odrodzenie* in February 1950, which marked his entry into Socialist Realism. In the article, Borowski distanced himself from his previous work. Of his Auschwitz stories, he wrote:

> It was pure "anti-fascism" without any positive solutions. When one depicts a human being's debasement under fascism, it is necessary also to reveal his heroism; one cannot wriggle out of one's involvement in the class struggle by means of "moral outrage" […] My ambition had been to reveal the "truth", but I ended up being objectively allied with fascist ideology.[141]

Equally telling in this regard was the fate of Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Ashes and Diamonds*. Initially, the author had intended to write a novel or a short story about the moral bankruptcy caused by war and occupation and about the dilemmas involved in evaluating the behaviour of people in situations of extreme terror.[142] The main protagonist was to be a lawyer, who, despite being widely respected before the war, becomes a concentration camp *Kapo* and abuses his comrades. As the novel took shape, however, Andrzejewski relegated this motif and shifted the emphasis towards the problem of the struggle over the future Polish state. The decision proved exceptionally fortuitous: in the summer of 1948, *Ashes and Diamonds* received *Odrodzenie*'s prestigious literary prize. Among the other candidates was Borowski's collection of short stories *Farewell to Maria*. Andrzejewski's work

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139 Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata*, p. 144.

140 See, inter alia: *Za Wolność i Lud*: Mieczysław Kowalski, "Buchenwaldzki Krankenbau" (1 Sep. 1949); Jerzy Rawicz, "Aufsicht" (15 Jan. 1950); Teofil Witek, "Pod sztandarem proletariackiego internacjonalizmu. Powstanie w Buchenwaldzie" (1-15 Apr. 1950); Samuel Willenberg, "Treblinka w ogniu" (1-15 Apr. 1950).

141 Tadeusz Borowski, "Rozmowy", *Odrodzenie*, 19 Feb. 1950.

142 Anna Synoradzka, *Andrzejewski*, Kraków 1997, p. 88.

was rewarded for the relevance of its subject-matter.[143] In Andrzej Wajda's film of Andrzejewski's novel, shot in 1958, the theme of Judge Kossecki is completely omitted.[144] Andrzejewski wrote the screenplay himself.

No less important was another change: in the 1948 edition of the novel, the first to be published in book form, Podgórski, having been persuaded by Kossecki, abandons his plan to hand him over to the authorities.[145] He decides he has no right to judge others since he has never been in a similar situation.

Yet despite winning an award, Andrzejewski's novel soon fell out of favour with the authorities. In an article published in January 1950 in *Odrodzenie*, the author distanced himself—much as Borowski would do a month later—from his previous work. He wrote that in *Ashes and Diamonds* he had been unable to capture "the fundamental aspects of historical change resulting from the class struggle".[146] It was only during the first wave of the post-Stalin thaw that the book was partially rehabilitated, and in 1954 a third, edited version appeared. Andrzejewski—probably under the pressure of criticism, and perhaps at the behest of the censor—made significant alterations to the text.[147] One of the major changes was the ending of the novel. In this and in all subsequent editions of *Ashes and Diamonds*, Podgórski, after his conversation with Kossecki, decides to hand him over to the Security Service.[148]

At first sight this change may seem surprising: why, during a period when the problem of prisoner functionaries and the entanglement of prisoners in the system of camp terror was becoming increasingly taboo, did Andrzejewski decide to revise the ending of the novel and punish Kossecki? In essence, however, this change was part of a broader trend to create an image of a united prisoner community, and a united national community, whose members had resisted their Nazi oppressors in harmony. The author of *Ashes and Diamonds* did not deny that there had been criminal elements among Polish concentration camp prisoners. However, the new ending of the novel suggested—as did the texts of Ludwik Rajewski and Jerzy Rawicz—that it was possible to make unequivocal moral judgements in this regard; that it was possible to separate good from evil, the wheat from the chaff. It also suggested that only very few had been susceptible to evil; otherwise, it would be necessary to put the whole of society in the dock. In this way, "bad

143 Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata*, p. 143.

144 Film: *Ashes and Diamonds*, dir. Andrzej Wajda, screenplay Jerzy Andrzejewski 1958.

145 Andrzejewski, *Popiół i diament*, Warszawa 1948, p. 331.

146 Jerzy Andrzejewski, "Notatki. Wyznania i rozmyślania pisarza", *Odrodzenie*, 29 Jan. 1950.

147 Synoradzka, *Andrzejewski*, pp. 116-118.

148 Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Popiół i diament*, Warszawa 1954, p. 296. Cf. also notes to: Andrzejwski, *Asche und Diamant*, pp. 398-401.

people" were symbolically excluded from the prisoner community and also from the national community, thanks to which those communities could live on, convinced of their own innocence. That such exclusion was merely symbolic in character is also evidenced by the fact that precisely the opposite was happening in the judicial system. At the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s, the number of people tried under the August Decree significantly declined, and the judgements delivered—leaving aside political trials, of course—were increasingly mild.[149]

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The process by which the dark side of prisoner conduct became a taboo also had parallels in other Eastern bloc countries, notably the GDR. Both the Polish PZbWP and the East German VVN attempted to gain control over all publications concerning the concentration camps and the anti-fascist resistance movement.[150] Very similar methods were used by both organisations. In the GDR, all studies dealing with the camps were to be submitted to the relevant VVN committees for approval. In 1950, for instance, the entire print run of Rolf Weinstock's camp memoir, *Rolf Kopf hoch!*, was confiscated. The author was accused of focusing too much on suffering and on the desensitisation and brutalisation of prisoners and of failing to mention the camp resistance movement.

The manner in which certain aspects of camp life acquired taboo status in the GDR is well illustrated by the case of Bruno Apitz and his novel *Naked among Wolves*.[151] The book was written in the years 1954-1958 and tells the story of a three-year-old Jewish boy who, having been smuggled out of Auschwitz in a suitcase, is then transported to Buchenwald. There, hidden by German Communists and members of the camp resistance movement, he eventually sees liberation. The story, based on true facts, is a pretext for illustrating the heroism of members of the KPD imprisoned in Buchenwald. Susanne Hantke has analysed the original manuscript.[152] Her finding is that Apitz, himself a former Buchenwald inmate—probably as a result of conversations with, and perhaps pressure from, the publisher and his former camp comrades—progressively deleted from the manuscript all fragments that suggested ambivalent conduct on the part of German prisoner functionaries and members of the communist resistance movement. In the final version of the story, the leaders of the camp KPD were no longer identified as the highest-ranking members of the "prisoner self-administration"; there was no men-

149 Kubicki, *Zbrodnie wojenne w świetle prawa polskiego*, pp. 179-184; Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym*, p. 173.

150 Hansel, Reuter, *Das kurze Leben der VVN*, pp. 350-376.

151 Bruno Apitz, *Nackt unter Wölfen*, Halle a. S. 1958.

152 See: Susanne Handke's afterword to: Bruno Apitz, *Nackt unter Wölfen*, revised edition, edited by Susanne Handke and Angela Drescher, Berlin 2012.

tion of cronyism between prisoner functionaries and the SS, the killing of prisoners through lethal injection, or the changing of names on transportation lists.

By these and similar means, in both the GDR and in Poland, a vision of the camps was created that was devoid of all ambiguity. In this vision there was no place for "the grey zone" between good and evil, between victim and executioner, which Primo Levi wrote about in his Auschwitz memoir.[153] This does not mean that, in creating a simplified narrative, no reference was made in Poland or in East Germany to pre-existing and socially accepted interpretative models. However, the fact that this simplified narrative was supported by the Communist authorities meant that it became the only accepted interpretation of history.

Was this tendency—to exonerate one's own society from the crimes of the Second World War by constructing a black-and-white image of the past and excluding a small number of the most blameworthy individuals, or perhaps only random individuals, from the national community—a phenomenon that went beyond the borders of the Communist bloc? In his book *The Long Shadow of the Third Reich*, Klaus Bachmann uses the terms "inclusive" and "exclusive" historical policy. By absolving the general public of responsibility for crimes and by punishing only a few individuals in an act of "ritual cleansing", an inclusive historical policy promotes a dichotomous image of the past and strengthens a national community's belief in its own innocence. By contrast, an exclusive historical policy entails accusing various social groups—former economic and political elites, forced labourers, and prisoners of war, for instance—of involvement in crimes or collaboration, thereby stigmatising those groups and excluding them from public life. Citing research carried out by Pieter Lagrou, Bachmann suggests that the inclusive model of historical policy was dominant in France, the Netherlands, and also Germany, until the late 1960s and early 1970s, despite the different wartime experience of those countries. This policy, claims Bachmann, was dictated by the need to unite citizens around the idea of national reconstruction after the ravages of the war years:

> Generally speaking […] for post-war governments the main purpose of historical policy was integration. This is not surprising: under democratic conditions, the groups concerned were too big to be permanently excluded. Moreover, they were needed for demographic and economic reasons—population growth and national reconstruction. The permanent exclusion of those groups would only have been possible under a dictatorship, and this is precisely what Stalin did in relation to the deportees and prisoners of war who survived the German massacre.[154]

Despite a different political system, the situation in East Germany was identical:

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153 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, New York 1989, pp. 36-69.

154 Bachmann, *Długi cień Trzeciej Rzeszy*, p. 37.

> The Communist government of the GDR needed a broad social base to legitimise its authority, play an important role within the Soviet camp, and enable it to rebuild the country. The simplest solution was to offer to the broadest possible sections of society an image of the past based on a "tradition of resistance" created *ad hoc*.[155]

According to Bachmann, the policy adopted by the Polish authorities was different. They, too, used historical arguments but sought to exclude from public life all their political opponents, including members of the Home Army, the National Armed Forces, and other groups within the Polish Underground:

> An inclusive image of the occupation, an inclusive historical policy, which would have integrated former enemies—members of the Home Army and perhaps even members of the National Armed Forces—risked undermining the ideological basis of the new system. The Polish authorities were too weak to put the idea into practice against the wishes of their Soviet masters. In addition, an inclusive policy would have signalled the re-entry of Poland's pre-war elites into the political fold, which in the long term would have entailed the emergence of a pluralist society, thereby depriving the nascent Communist elites of their power. Under such circumstances, the image of the past which the Polish authorities offered to society after the war had to be exclusive in the extreme: it excluded everything that was not Stalinist—from pre-war political movements, through members of the Home Army and National Armed Forces (now decried as traitors and Nazi collaborators), to soldiers who had fought in "inappropriate" military units of the Western Allies.[156]

Although Bachmann's proposed classification of historical policy seems very useful, his claim that in the immediate post-war years the Polish authorities adopted an exclusive historical policy should be treated with some reservation. During the Stalinist period, the Polish Communists did indeed exclude a significant portion of society from public life, and did so using historical arguments. But in other respects their historical policy was inclusive. As Bachmann himself notes, in Poland there was no settling of scores with collaborators—"it only happened when it was necessary to weaken the influence of real or suspected political opponents". Because the authorities excluded a significant number of their own citizens from public life for political reasons, it would have been all the more imprudent to antagonise society further over the issue of collaboration. In addition, the belief in the united struggle of the Polish nation—"reactionary elements" notwithstanding—against the German occupiers and then, more broadly, against fascism and imperialism, was a major source of legitimacy for the Communist authorities in Poland. That is why the debate over the conduct of concentration camp prisoners was swiftly crushed through the combined efforts of the PZbWP and PPR/PZPR.

155 Ibid., pp. 54-55.
156 Ibid., pp. 101-102.

In this regard, the historical policy of the Polish authorities proved to be, at least at the level of rhetoric, as inclusive as that of de Gaulle's, Adenauer's or Ulbricht's.

The present work concerns the debate over the conduct of concentration camp prisoners and not of other social groups: forced labourers, prisoners of war, Jews imprisoned in ghettos, or simply the inhabitants of the General Government and other areas of occupied Poland. However, the debate over the problem of prisoner functionaries also provoked a more extensive discussion of the social and moral consequences of the 1939-1945 period for Polish society: the problem of depravity caused by war and occupation was not, according to the writer and historian Paweł Jasienica, restricted solely to the reality of the concentration camps but applied to the totality of the wartime experience. The fact is, wrote Jasienica, that "during the occupation we all became morally infected. Perhaps there were individuals who came out of it in one piece, or who managed to become better, more honourable people because of it. But this was certainly not true of the masses. Looting and bootleg alcohol are not the whole story. We still harbour—*in capita et in membris*—a disregard for human life."[157] Stanisław Wygodzki likewise extended his observations on the relations between concentration camp prisoners to the experience of the Second World War in general. In his war memoir, he wrote:

> There was the cruelty of the perpetrators who condemned millions of people imprisoned in camps and ghettos to death by starvation; the cruelty of those who wanted to save their life at any cost; the cruelty in murder, in slow or sudden killing; and the cruelty in wanting to stay alive. It was not only the system used against the enemy that was cruel; so, too, was the person exposed to that system. This applies not just to people who were physically imprisoned in camps. The system equally affected those who for years remained "free" during the dark night of fascism. And just as the light from the lantern in Goya's *Execution* unites, rather than separates, the firing squad and the captives, so it was cruelty that united the Nazis and their victims.[158]

157 Paweł Jasienica, "Spowiedź udręczonych", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 Oct. 1947.
158 Stanisław Wygodzki, "Kaufering—Obóz II", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jul. 1947.

PART II
PLACES

Chapter 4
Sites of Memory, Sites of Forgetting

Since the 1990s, the term "sites of memory" has become very popular in Poland; it is used, particularly in the context of the Second World War, to describe the sites of former Nazi concentration camps and death camps. Many of those sites, however, have never been properly commemorated, while others have for decades remained entirely abandoned. Perhaps, therefore, they might be more properly described as "sites of non-memory" or "sites of forgetting".

In the post-war years, whether a particular site was commemorated or not depended on a number of different historical, political, and practical factors. The determinants included not only the type of camp and the number of victims, but also the nationality of those victims. The existence of an active resistance movement with an appropriate political orientation might also elevate the importance of a particular camp, as happened in the case of Auschwitz; the geographical location and accessibility of a site, as well as the condition of the camp buildings, were also not without significance. Even after 1945, some former Nazi concentration camps continued to be used as places of isolation for prisoners of war, German civilians, and domestic political opponents, which prevented or at least delayed the commemoration of such sites; this was the case with Świętochłowice, Potulice, and Jaworzno, among others.[1] Also, the fate of a site depended to a large extent on the number of survivors and on whether the survivors' socio-political status and level of organisation allowed them to lobby for the cause of remembrance. All these issues will be discussed in this chapter.

Majdanek and Auschwitz: Vying for "Pre-eminence"[2]

On the night of 22 July 1944 the Red Army reached Lublin, forcing the last SS units to flee Majdanek; this was the first concentration camp to be liberated by the Allies.[3] Almost as soon as they had entered the camp, the Soviet military au-

1 On the subject of these camps see: Bogusław Kopka, *Obozy pracy w Polsce 1944-1950. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 126-129, 150-152, 159-160.

2 Czesław Stanisławski, "Dlaczego Oświęcim?", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Sep. 1947.

3 The section of this book about the creation of the Museum at Majdanek is largely based

thorities set up a special investigative commission; Polish representatives were co-opted into it in mid-August.[4] The new Polish-Soviet Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed at Majdanek was headed by Andrzej Witos, the vice-chairman of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN); his deputy was appointed by the Soviet authorities.[5] The commission put forward the idea of creating a museum of martyrdom on the site of the Majdanek camp. In an interview for the Soviet press, Witos announced that the camp would be preserved "as a museum to human suffering", and that it would provide "visible evidence of the crimes committed by the Germans" against Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, Jews, and people of other nationalities who had been imprisoned there.[6] In October, the PKWN decided to appoint a special bureau responsible for setting up the new museum at Majdanek.[7] None of the first four directors of the bureau—and they changed fairly often—had been a prisoner of the camp.[8] The first draft of the decree on the creation of the State Museum at Majdanek (PMM) came into being in May 1945, but it was rejected by the National Homeland Council (KRN).[9]

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on the following studies: Edward Dziadosz, Edward Gryń, "Kronika Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1955-1963", *Zeszyty Majdanka*, Vol. 1 (1965); Edward Balawejder, "Kronika Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku 1944-1994 (ważniejsze wydarzenia)", *Zeszyty Majdanka*, Vol. 16 (1995); Tomasz Kranz, Maria Wiśnioch, "Działalność oświatowa Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", ibid.; Janina Kiełboń, "Jak powstało Muzeum na Majdanku" in Janina Kiełboń and Edward Balawejder (eds) *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947. Wybór dokumentów*, Lublin 2004; Religa Grzegorz, *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku 1944-1950* (manuscript).

4 "Komunikat Polsko-Sowieckiej Komisji na Majdanku", *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 Aug. 1944; see also: Motas, Foreword to *Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce i jej oddziały terenowe w 1945 roku*, pp. 7-9.

5 Minutes no. 1 of the meeting of the Polish-Soviet Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed at Majdanek, 18 Aug. 1944, AIPN, OKBZ w Lublinie 1944-1949 194.

6 Interview on the Polish-Soviet Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed at Majdanek given by A. Witos to a correspondent from the fronts, Lt.-Col. Zbarazhsky of the Soviet Army, 12 Sep. 1944, Archives of the State Museum at Majdanek (APMM), Archiwum Zakładowe (AZ) I/1.

7 Minutes of the session of the PKWN, 17 Oct. 1944, AAN, Prezydium PKWN I/4; Motions passed at the session of the PKWN 17 Oct. 1944, AAN, Prezydium PKWN I/7 (mcf. 24055).

8 The first directors of the museum were Antoni Ferski, Kazimierz Biernacki (Jan.–May 1945), Józef Kojdecki (May 1945–Jul. 1946) and Stanisław Brodziak (Aug. 1946–Jul. 1950). For a full list of the directors of the State Museum at Majdanek (PMM) with their dates in the post, see: Balawejder, "Kronika Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", p. 124.

9 Draft decree on the creation of the State Museum at Majdanek, May 1945, APMM, AZ I/13. Published in *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, pp. 115-116. Cf. also: Draft decree of 10 Aug. 1945 on the creation of the State Museum at Majdanek,

Despite appeals from the museum's management, its legal status remained unresolved until July 1947.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that Polish Army and Red Army units were still stationed within the perimeter of the camp, organisational and maintenance work began in the autumn of 1944.[10] In a report submitted to the PKWN in November of that year, the first director of the museum, Antoni Ferski, proposed that the museum should illustrate "the whole life of the camp and the torments of its victims, their ordeal from the moment they entered the camp, through all the agonies—'experiments', 'exercises', 'work', 'baths', and punishments—to the gassing of prisoners and incineration of their bodies".[11]

Since the museum received only a very modest government subsidy, the management tried in various ways to raise extra cash—from publishing brochures and posters to organising propaganda and fund-raising events. The first such event to be organised was "Majdanek Week", which took place in September 1945. Despite a chronic shortage of money, building materials and transportation, not to mention looting and constant disputes with the army stationed in the camp[12], the museum's permanent exhibition, located in one of the former barracks, was officially opened as part of "Majdanek Week".

Initially, it seemed that Majdanek would become the central place of remembrance in post-war Poland. In order to bring the enormity of the Nazis' crimes to the world's attention, explained Antoni Ferski in a memo at the beginning of January 1945, it had been decided to gather all the evidence together in one location. "That central point is the State Museum at Majdanek. It is a bloody stain on the map of Europe; a stain that will inform the whole world about the suffering of nations, and in particular about the martyrdom of the Polish nation."[13] Yet Majdanek

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AAN, KRN, Wydz. Prawny 259 (mcf. B-7892); Official letter from the Officer-in-chief of the Legal Dept of the KRN Presidium Office to the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, 29 Aug. 1945, AAN, KRN, Wydz. Prawny 259 (mcf. B-7892).

10 Ordinance of the acting head of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces (WP), Brig.-Gen. Bronisław Połturzycki on the handover to the Polish-Soviet Commission of the site and buildings of the former camp for the purpose of creating a museum, 10 Oct. 1944, APMM, AZ I/1. Published in *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944*-1947, p. 59.

11 Director of the PMM, Antoni Ferski, to the Chairman of the KRN, 14 Nov. 1944, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne KRN, Wydz. Prawny 259 (mcf. B 7892). Cf. also: Report on the organisation of the museum, director of the PMM, Antoni Ferski, 12 Nov. 1944 (cited after: *Powstanie Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku*, pp. 11-14).

12 For more on this subject, see: Kiełboń, "Jak powstało Muzeum na Majdanku", pp. 8-11; Religa, *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku 1944-1950.*

13 Memorandum of the director of the PMM, Antoni Ferski, regarding works completed and scheduling for further action, 8 Jan. 1945, APMM, AZ I/3 and AAN, PKWN XV/5. Cited after: *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, p. 81.

was soon to be overshadowed by Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was liberated shortly afterwards. No doubt this was largely due to the history of the two camps. According to the latest research, approximately 1.1 million people perished in Auschwitz; at the time, however, the estimates ranged from four to even six million victims.[14] In total, around 400,000 people had been registered in the camp. Thus, even in light of the newer, much diminished estimates, Auschwitz was still the largest Nazi concentration and extermination camp in occupied Europe, in terms of both the number of prisoners and the number of victims. Another factor that had a significant impact on the history of the Auschwitz Museum was that although more than 90 per cent of the victims were Jews, between 70,000 and 75,000 Poles had also perished in the camp; this figure was considerably inflated during the 1940s and in later years. Even according to the latest estimates, however, Auschwitz was still, beside Warsaw, proportionately the largest site not only of Jewish but also of Polish martyrdom.

Another decisive factor in the post-war fortunes of Auschwitz was its international character. Aside from Polish Jews, Jews from other European countries, and Poles, the victims included people of many other nationalities, including Roma, Russians, Belarusians, as well as Germans, Austrians, Czechs, and French[15]; it was also one of very few concentration camps where an organised and to some extent multinational resistance movement had existed.[16] Left-wing and communist activists had played a critical role in this movement, which made Auschwitz a convenient propaganda tool for the new authorities.

However, there were also more prosaic reasons as to why Auschwitz evolved into the central symbol of national martyrdom in Poland. First, a relatively high number of people survived the camp, amongst them Polish political prisoners. Second, this community came to be dominated by left-wing activists, including the

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14 Piper, *Ilu ludzi zginęło w KL Auschwitz*, p. 92. Among those who wrote of six million victims was Ludwik Rajewski (*Oświęcim w systemie RSHA*, Warszawa 1946).

15 According to Franciszek Piper, of the approximate total of 400,000 prisoners registered in Auschwitz-Birkenau and its sub-scamps, around 200,000 were Jews, 130,000-140,000 Poles, some 21,000 Roma, around 12,000 Soviet POWs, and around 25,000 people of other nationalities. Of those 400,000 registered prisoners, over 200,000 perished in the camp, about 100,000 of them Jews, 60,000-65,000 Poles, 19,000 Roma, 12,000 Soviet POWs, and 10,000-15,000 prisoners of other nationalities. Aside from this number, over 900,000 people never recorded were deported to the camp and killed immediately on arrival. Of those killed in this manner, some 890,000 were Jews from Poland and other European countries, 10,000 were Poles, 3,000 were Soviet POWs, and 2,000 were Roma (Piper, *Ilu ludzi zginęło w KL Auschwitz*, pp. 81-91).

16 On the subject of the resistance movement in Auschwitz, see: Józef Garliński, *Fighting Auschwitz: the resistance movement in the concentration camp*, Alexandria, Va. 1993; *Auschwitz 1940-1945*, Vol. 4 (*Ruch oporu*).

future Prime Minister, Józef Cyrankiewicz; the Mayor of Kraków, deputy to the KRN, and first director of the Bureau of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland (GKBZNwP), Alfred Fiderkiewicz; and the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom at the Ministry of Art and Culture (MKiS), Ludwik Rajewski. Former Auschwitz inmates also managed to secure many of the top posts in the PZbWP. They formed a lobby that actively sought to have the camp commemorated.[17]

In the autumn of 1945, after the Soviet armies had left Auschwitz, a group of former inmates sent a memo to Bolesław Bierut requesting that the Polish authorities take over the site of the former camp: "The soil of Auschwitz, stained with blood and mixed with the ashes of martyrs, demands the respect of state and society alike. For time immemorial, this soil must remain the property of the entire nation and be commemorated with dignity."[18] The signatories of the letter declared their readiness to take care of Auschwitz-Birkenau themselves; all they asked of the President was financial support and a guarantee of military protection for the site. In December 1945, at a plenary session of the KRN, Alfred Fiderkiewicz submitted a proposal that Auschwitz-Birkenau be turned into "a place of remembrance of Polish and international martyrdom".[19] Barely two months later, the Presidium of the Council of Ministers decided, in accordance with the former inmates' wishes, to entrust the site to the MKiS.[20]

The PZbWP became intensely involved in the commemoration of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Initially, former prisoners had hoped that the authorities would allow the association to manage the site.[21] Indeed, in one of the first drafts of the law on the establishment of the State Museum at Auschwitz, dated autumn 1946, it was

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17 On the subject of the beginnings of the Auschwitz Museum, see also: Jonathan Huener, "Geneza Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau", *Zeszyty Oświęcimskie* 23 (2002); idem, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration 1945-1979*, pp. 59-78. See also: Jacek Lechandro, *Zburzyć i zaorać? Idea założenia Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w świadectwach prasy polskiej w latach 1945-1948*, Oświęcim 2007, pp. 38-72.

18 Memorandum of former prisoners of the Auschwitz camp regarding taking care of the site of KL Auschwitz, 13 Nov. 1945, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 19B.

19 AAN, KRN, Wydz. Prezydialny 12 (mcf. B-7680): Minutes of the 9th plenary session of the KRN, 29-31 Dec. 1945 and 2-3 Jan. 1946; Shorthand report on the KRN session of 29-31 Dec. 1945 and 2-3 Jan. 1946.

20 Minutes of a meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, 14 Feb. 1946, AAN, URM 5/1100 (mcf. 23157); Note from the Presidium of the Council of Ministers to the MKiS, 26 Feb. 1946, AAN, URM 5/760; Circular no. 5, 7 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 12.

21 Minutes of a meeting of the ZG PZbWP, 12 Jun. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 5.

assumed that the administration of the entire complex would be handed over to the PZbWP.[22]

Even before legislative work had commenced, former prisoners set about organising the museum. In March 1946, the MKiS entrusted supervision of the Auschwitz-Birkenau site to the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom[23]; its director, Ludwik Rajewski, immediately began to assemble staff for the museum. From the director to the guards, the staff was almost entirely composed of former Auschwitz inmates.[24] All employees were approved by the Executive Board of the PZbWP. As early as in the summer of 1946, on the site of Auschwitz I, a modest exhibition was opened in the basement of one of the blocks.[25]

The museum was officially opened on 14 June 1947—the seventh anniversary of the first transport of Polish political prisoners to Auschwitz. The ceremony was accorded the highest possible rank. Speeches were given by the Prime Minister and chairman of the PZbWP Executive Board, Józef Cyrankiewicz; the secretary-general of the *Fédération Internationale des Anciens Prisonniers Politiques* (FIAPP), Zygmunt Balicki; the Minister of Art and Culture, Stefan Dybowski; and, representing the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP), the parliamentary deputy Józef Sack.[26] Also present were other representatives of the CKŻP, representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the consuls of Czechoslovakia, France, and Great Britain. After the speeches and religious services, the exhibition was officially opened. This was followed by a

22 Draft decree of the KRN on the creation of a Polish and international monument to martyrdom on the site of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, 10 Sep. 1946, AAN, URM 5/760.

23 National Directorate for Museums and Conservation to the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, 10 Apr. 1946, AAN, URM, Biuro Prezydialne 5/760. The Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom (1947-1949 the Department for Monuments and Museums of Struggle and Martyrdom, 1949-1954 the Department for Museums and Monuments of the Struggle against Fascism) was established in March 1945 as an organisational cell of the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation (1951-1959 the Central Museum Administration) affiliated to the MKiS. The first head of the department was Ludwik Rajewski.

24 For a list of the employees and associates of the Auschwitz Museum in the years 1946-1952, see: Lechandro, *Zburzyć i zaorać?*, pp. 362-364.

25 Photograph: Archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim (APMAB) 03441. One article on the exhibition was: Zofia Rozensztrauch, "Auschwitz po raz drugi...", *Nasze Słowo*, 18 Mar. 1947.

26 Programme of the opening ceremony of the Auschwitz Museum on 14 Jun. 1947, APMAB, Projekty ramowe, założenia ogólne Muzeum Oświęcimskiego 1946-1947. For a description of the ceremony, see: Czesław Stanisławski and Wojciech Rawicz, "Podniosłe dni Oświęcimia. Otwarcie Muzeum Martyrologii Polskiej", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947; "Świadectwo zbrodni 14 czerwca 1947 r. w Oświęcimiu" (hs), *Nasze Słowo*, 20 Jun. 1947.

solemn procession to Birkenau, where wreaths were laid at the ruins of the crematorium and the *Rota* [Oath], an early 20th-century Polish patriotic anthem, was sung. In his speech, Cyrankiewicz said: "This museum shall not only serve as a warning and as eternal proof of German atrocity; it shall also speak the truth about humanity in its struggle for freedom; it shall heighten vigilance so that genocidal forces will never again bring destruction to nations."[27]

Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz delivering a speech at the official opening of the State Museum at Auschwitz, 14 June 1947 (courtesy of APMAB).

The exhibition was not yet complete and its further expansion was planned; it occupied seven blocks in Auschwitz I. The display in Block 4 was entitled "The Extermination of Millions". Urns containing ashes of the murdered as well as "symbolic remnants of the property of gassed victims" were displayed in the basement.[28] Hung on the walls in one of the ground-floor rooms was a map of the camp, as well

27 Stanisławski and Rawicz, "Podniosłe dni Oświęcimia. Otwarcie Muzeum Martyrologii Polskiej", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947.

28 Temporary Guidebook to the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and to the museum, no date, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

as a map of Europe showing the countries from which people had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. A second room, dedicated to the extermination of Jews, was arranged by the CKŻP. In a third room, plaster models of the Birkenau crematoria and the remains of the gas chambers were displayed. Zyklon B gas canisters, victims' hair, and exhibits illustrating life in the camp were placed in the remaining rooms. Blocks 5 and 6 housed victims' personal belongings. Blocks 8 and 9, arranged in the form of an open-air museum, recreated life in the camp during the years 1940 and 1944. Sketches and drawings by former prisoners were displayed in Block 7. A mausoleum was opened in Block 11, the former headquarters of the *Politische Abteilung* (Political Department). As the Temporary Guidebook explained: "Once separated from the rest of the camp by solid doors and now separated by a grille, the courtyard was the courtyard of Block 11, the Block of Death, where tens of thousands of prisoners were murdered. The restored Wall of Death is a place where people from all over the world worship and lay flowers, symbolically paying homage to our dead heroes."

In July 1947, the Polish Parliament passed the Act on Commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and other Nations in Auschwitz.[29] The Ministry of Art and Culture was to supervise the activities of the State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau (PMOB), while the Council for the Protection of Martyrdom Sites, established in parallel, was to act as an advisory and consultative body[30]; its members included representatives of the government, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Reconstruction, the Ministry of Art and Culture, the Ministry of Public Administration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as one delegate each from the GKBZNwP, the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the PZbWP, FIAPP, the CKŻP, and other public organisations.[31] The Act establishing the PMOB also included a provision that authorised the Ministry of Art and Culture "to transfer

29 Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on Commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations in Auschwitz, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 52, item 265.

30 Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on the Creation of a Council for the Protection of Martyrdom Sites, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 52, item 264. Virtually from the outset, documents used an expanded name, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, but this was not officially enshrined in law until April 1949 (Act of 7 Apr. 1949 Amending the Act on the Creation of a Council for the Protection of Martyrdom Sites, Journal of Laws 1949, no. 25, item 183.) For simplicity's sake, I use the uniform abbreviation ROPWiM. For more on the subject of the ROPWiM, see: Alfred Górny, "Z historii Rady" in *Pamięć wiecznie żywa. 40 lat działalności Rady Ochrony Pomników Walki i Męczeństwa*, Warszawa 1988.

31 Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on the Creation of a Council for the Protection of Martyrdom Sites, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 52, item 264; Declaration of the President of the Republic of 12 Sept. 1947 Concerning Correction of an Error in the Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on the Creation of a Council for the Protection of Martyrdom Sites, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 63, item 372, 12 Sep. 1947.

the management of all or part of the expropriated land" to the PZbWP.[32] Yet this provision was never used, and the museum found itself under the direct supervision of the MKiS. One could interpret this as a defeat for the "Auschwitz lobby". In all likelihood, however, the PZbWP withdrew its earlier demands, fearing that to maintain the PMOB would be beyond the organisation's financial capabilities. Back in November 1946, Rajewski had suggested at a meeting of the PZbWP's Executive Board that the association should renounce its claims to the Auschwitz site on economic grounds.[33] This seemed advantageous, since the choice of museum staff and the personal ties that existed between the PZbWP and MKiS meant that former prisoners would remain the de facto managers of the site. This situation lasted until 1950, when the PZPR assumed almost total control over the PMOB.

Although the Act on the establishment of the PMOB was accompanied by analogous legislation concerning the PMM, by that time the Lublin camp had already been pushed into the background.[34] Although in an article published in the spring of 1947 in *Wolni Ludzie*, the PMM director, Stanisław Brodziak, announced that the Majdanek site would see "the creation in the near future of a unique monument […], the most democratic monument in the world; a symbol of the victory of justice over lawlessness, and of the fraternity of nations in the struggle for human freedom", lack of money and the authorities' waning interest meant that the plan for the development of the Majdanek site, adopted in the summer of that year, was never implemented.[35] In the first half of 1948, the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM even discussed the possibility of transforming the PMM into a "regional branch" of the Auschwitz Museum, since it believed that maintaining two separate museums was pointless.[36] Although this plan was never realised, up to the end of the 1950s the State Museum at Majdanek was de facto treated as a poor cousin of the PMOB, its exhibitions being to a large extent based on the Auschwitz model.[37] It was not until the years 1959-1962 that the PMM

32 Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on Commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations in Auschwitz, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 52, item 265

33 Minutes of a meeting of the ZG PZbWP, 22 Nov. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 5.

34 Act of 2 Jul. 1947 on Commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations in Majdanek, Journal of Laws 1947, no. 52, item 266.

35 Stanisław Brodziak, "Majdanek staje się symbolem", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Sep. 1947. Cf. also: "Plan ogólny urządzenia b. obozu wyniszczenia Majdanek, 1947" (cited after: *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, pp. 196-197).

36 Minutes of the first conference of the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM, 22 Apr. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 1A; Minutes of the third conference of the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM, 30 Jun. 1948, APMM, AZ I/14.

37 This was particularly true of the purely propagandist exhibition created in the years 1951-1954, which to a considerable extent reproduced the Auschwitz model. Previous exhibition scenarios had also been based on PMOB plans, however. Cf., inter alia: "Pismo Naczel-

came up with a project to develop the site and an exhibition scenario that encapsulated the specificity of the place.[38] The difference in the importance of the two museums was also reflected in the number of visitors. According to official data, in the years 1946-1950 between 40,000 and 70,000 people visited Majdanek annually. By contrast, visitor numbers to Auschwitz were already at around 100,000 in 1946, rising to nearly 200,000 in 1948.[39]

Wolni Ludzie, too, concentrated mainly on the history of Auschwitz, which met with the disapproval of prisoners of other camps. In response to readers' letters on this matter, in the autumn of 1947 the magazine published an article by Czesław Stanisławski entitled "Why Auschwitz?". Stanisławski explained that the focus on Auschwitz was entirely justified, since it was the first camp "where defenceless victims of Nazi brutality were shot and murdered en masse; the first crematorium was built in Auschwitz". And that is why the place had to be regarded as a symbol "of all Nazi crimes against humanity. But this does not mean that Auschwitz wishes to hold the pre-eminent position in a dishonourable race to win recognition. Not at all." No one denied that people had suffered in other camps. "Nevertheless, national organisations of former political prisoners have unanimously decided that it is precisely Auschwitz which should become the symbol

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nej Dyrekcji Muzeów i Ochrony Zabytków zawierające wytyczne do działalności PMM, 15.10.1946" (cited after: *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, p. 184); Minutes of the conference of the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM with the participation of the PMM directorate and representatives of the Society for the Care of Majdanek, 2-4 May 1949, APMM, AZ I/14; Material plans for the arrangement of the interior of Barrack no. 44 of the PMM, "Źródła ludobójstwa" (The Sources of Genocide), no date, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 17; Material plans for the interior of Barrack no. 62, "Walka o pokój" (The Struggle for Peace) in Majdanek, 1950, AAN, MKiS, Gabinet Ministra 108; Design for the exhibition "Ludobójstwo" (Genocide) at the PMM, 1950-1951, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/56.

38 See: PMM director, Edward Gryń, Principles for the project proposed by the Museum at Majdanek to the CZM, 16 Feb. 1959, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 15; Romuald Dylewski, PMM—Spatial design concept, Jun. 1961, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 16. See also: Kranz, Wiśnioch, "Działalność oświatowa Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", pp. 44-45; Balawejder, "Kronika Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku 1944-1994", p. 135.

39 "Zestawienie frekwencji zwiedzających PMM za lata 1944-1994" in Kranz, Wiśnioch, "Działalność oświatowa Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", pp. 58-59; Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, p. 68. The data for the PMM and the PMOB are not fully comparable as PMM employees did not include in their reports the participants of "Majdanek Week" or other mass commemorative events. Moreover, as the reports emphasised, not all those who visited Majdanek were included in the statistics. Nevertheless, it is clear that the number of visitors to Majdanek was significantly lower than the number of people visiting the Museum at Auschwitz.

of all Nazi concentration camps of the 1939-1945 period. And that is also why it has been decided that a museum for posterity shall be established at Auschwitz, to illustrate all manifestations of Nazi savagery as well as the underground struggle within the camp against the violence of the SS."[40]

Already in the 1940s, the Polish authorities accorded major international significance to both the Auschwitz Museum and the Majdanek Museum. Indeed, in a letter of September 1946 concerning the draft legislation on the establishment of the PMOB and PMM, Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski added the handwritten comment: "Make sure that Auschwitz and Majdanek are dealt with on an international scale."[41] The first plans to create national exhibitions in Majdanek arose as early as in the autumn of 1945.[42] During the "Majdanek Week" commemorative events in September 1946, barracks were ceremonially handed over to delegates from 22 countries whose citizens had perished in the camp.[43] Similar plans were laid for Auschwitz.[44] Even at the turn of 1950/1951, the creation of national exhibitions in Auschwitz I was still being mooted.[45] Several prisoners' and veterans' organisations from various European countries, including the French *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés Résistants et Patriotes*, the Dutch *Verenigd Verzet 1940-1945*, and the Czechoslovak *Svaz bojovníků za svobodu*, expressed a desire to prepare such exhibitions.[46] However, all projects of this kind

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40 Czesław Stanisławski, "Dlaczego Oświęcim?", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Sep. 1947.

41 Office of the KRN Presidium to Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski, AAN, URM, 5/760, 21 Nov. 1946.

42 See, inter alia: Minutes of a meeting of the special committee working on the form of the nascent Majdanek Museum, 26 Oct. 1945; Official copy of the spatial design plans for the Majdanek Museum made by Romuald Gutt, 5 Nov. 1945 in *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, pp. 146, 150-151.

43 "Dyr. PMM S. Brodziak do Dowództwa Okręgu Wojskowego w Lublinie w sprawie przygotowań do obchodów Tygodnia Majdanka, 3.09.1946" in *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, p. 183. Photographs: Symbolic handing over of the barracks to the nations in field IV, APMM, Fotografie, Kolekcja Nr 6 (Wydarzenia w Muzeum 1944-1948), 6.46.7.10-11.

44 Circular no. 5/45, 7 Jun. 1945, AAN, PZbWP 12; Circular no. 5/47 (L. Rajewski and S. Haupe, Appeal to former political prisoners regarding the Museum at Auschwitz), 8 Feb. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 13.

45 Official letter from Antoni Korczowski (National Directorate for Museums and Conservation) to the director of the General Secretariat of FIAPP, Edward Kowalski, 1 Dec. 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD 2/271; Adam Kulik, Note regarding work on the reorganisation and expansion of the PMOB, 2 Dec. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

46 AAN, ZBoWiD 2/271: *Fédération Nationale des Déportés et Internés Résistants et Patriotes* (Paris) to the secretariat of FIAPP (Warsaw), 13 Feb. 1951; Official letter from the *Verenigd Verzet 1940-1945* (Amsterdam), 9 Feb. 1951; Official letter from the *Svaz bojovníkù za svobodu* (Praga), 22 Dec. 1950.

were foiled by Stalinisation and the escalation of the Cold War, and were not reconsidered until the mid-1950s. In 1960, Hungarian and Czechoslovak exhibitions were opened in Auschwitz I; East German and Soviet exhibitions followed a year later.[47] Over subsequent years, some West European countries, including Austria, France, and Italy, set up their own national pavilions. However, there was no resumption of plans to establish national exhibitions at Majdanek, as a result of which the place lost significance

"The Death of Birkenau"[48]

The issue of the commemoration of Birkenau deserves to be discussed separately. Although the site of the camp belonged to the PMOB as well, for many years it remained almost entirely abandoned. Some researchers have attributed the museum staff's lack of interest in Birkenau to the fact that the camp had primarily been a place for the extermination of Jews[49]; this claim, however, needs to be analysed in greater detail.

It is true that Birkenau (Auschwitz II)—the main centre of extermination, located barely 3 km away—was of far greater importance to Holocaust survivors than Auschwitz I, where relatively few Jews had been imprisoned. "The Auschwitz camp is effectively divided into two parts: Auschwitz and Birkenau," wrote CKŻP employee Zofia Rozensztrauch in a report submitted after her official visit to the Auschwitz Museum in January 1947. "And although in Poland and around the world everyone knows the name of Auschwitz, it is indisputable that Birkenau is the place where the soil is most bloodstained. For it was in Birkenau (a camp five times larger than Auschwitz) where the smoke from three crematoria could be seen day and night, where the

47 Emeryka Iwaszko, "Wystawy Państwowego Muzeum w Oświęcimiu w latach 1945-1973", *Muzea Walki* 8 (1975). On the subject of the internationalisation of Auschwitz in the second half of the 1950s, see also: Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration*, pp. 145-184; Zofia Wóycicka, "Zur Internationalität der Gedenkkultur. Die Gedenkstätte Auschwitz-Birkenau im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West 1954-1978", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 45 (2005).

48 "Śmierć Birkenau", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947.

49 See, inter alia, Jonathan Huener, who writes: "Polish national martyrdom and the perpetual German threat were the outstanding features of official Auschwitz memory and its physical manifestations, while the extermination of Jews at Auschwitz would remain, for decades to come, a fact acknowledged but inadequately expressed at the memorial site. In effect, Poland had retained the more complete landscape of the concentration camp in which Poles had languished and where many had met a brutal death, but had abbreviated the extermination camp in which European Jews had perished." (*Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration*, pp. 77-78.)

greatest number of prisoners suffered and perished, and where the mass slaughter of millions of Jewish citizens took place."[50] Despite this, complained Rozensztrauch, it was Auschwitz I that had "remained a 'business'", becoming the seat of the soon-to-be established museum. She attributed this to the fact that "Auschwitz boasts brick masonry houses, whereas Birkenau, by contrast, has wooden horse barracks, the so-called *Pferdebaracke*, slowly rotting in the rain. It should be added that Auschwitz is home to the infamous Block 11, where hangings and executions by firing squad took place; this is, however [*sic*], one of the Poles' holiest relics."

The neglect of the Birkenau site also aroused resentment amongst other members and employees of the CKŻP.[51] The matter was brought up with Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz and the Minister of Culture.[52] In July 1947, the CŻKH sent a memo to the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, in which, amongst other demands concerning the organisation of the PMOB, it stressed that the museum should encompass both Auschwitz and Birkenau. As the authors of the memo, Józef Kermisz and Nachman Blumental, explained: "We are demanding this because Auschwitz, together with its adjoining sites, has become a vast Jewish cemetery (as well as a cemetery for other nations); it is a place where approximately 1.5 million Jews were martyred; this constitutes 25 per cent of total Jewish losses in the Second World War."[53] The appeals made by Jewish organisations in Poland did not, however, produce any palpable results. All that the CKŻP managed to secure was the erection of a small monument near to the ruins of the crematoria with an inscription in Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew: "In memory of the millions of Jews, martyrs, and fighters exterminated in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp as a result of Nazi genocide in the years 1940-1945".[54]

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50 Report by Zofia Rozensztrauch from her official visit to the site of the former Auschwitz camp, 7 Jan. 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP, Tow. Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, Korespondencja krajowa 1947 r. 61.

51 See: Minutes of a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 26 Feb. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9; Minutes of a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 19 May 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a.

52 Ibid.; Minutes of a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 5 Jan. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

53 Memorandum of the CŻKH to the Dept for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, 14 Jul. 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 109.

54 BŻAP 37/413, 21 Apr. 1948; "Odsłonięcie pomnika męczeństwa w Oświęcimiu", *Opinia*, 7 May 1948. The monument was dismantled in 1966 to make way for the construction of the International Monument to the Victims of Fascism (Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, p. 29).

Memorial to the Jewish victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau, unveiled in the grounds of Birkenau on 19 April 1948, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (courtesy of APMAB).

The monument was unveiled in April 1948 as part of the commemorations marking the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Although the Polish political prisoners who managed Auschwitz were undoubtedly less interested than their Jewish comrades in commemorating Birkenau, it would be unfair to accuse them of deliberately omitting Birkenau from the plans for the development of the museum. A proposal from mid-1946 envisaged the creation within Birkenau of a monument to Polish and international martyrdom.[55] Reconstruction of one of the crematoria was also considered, and there was a plan to preserve some of the wooden barracks, which would house national exhibitions as well as displays devoted to other concentration camps. However, all of these ideas were soon abandoned. A paper by Stanisław Kłodziński published a few months later merely stated that Birkenau would be preserved as a symbolic cemetery. According to Kłodziński, various ideas were being considered, one of which involved the creation of a mound

55 Plans for the organisation of the museum in the former concentration camp at Auschwitz, 1 Jun. 1946, APMAB, Projekty ramowe i założenia ogólne Muzeum Oświęcim 1946-1947.

incorporating victims' ashes; another envisaged the construction of an international mausoleum on the ruins of the crematorium.[56] Subsequent proposals also mentioned the creation of a cemetery park in Birkenau and the erection of a huge monument in the form of a mausoleum[57]; several designs were even put forward. Thus, for instance, at a conference on the further expansion of the PMOB convened by the MKiS in July 1947, it was decided that a monument "with an artistic feature in the form of a chimney" would stand on the foundations of one of the crematoria.[58] "The mausoleum will be built of brick, with the names of the victims inscribed upon it; placed inside will be epitaphs commemorating particular nations."

Party functionaries also urged that the Birkenau site should be put in order and properly commemorated. In the summer of 1950, Leon Grosfeld, a representative of the Communist Party's Central Committee on the special commission charged with reorganising the PMOB, listed among other flaws in the existing design of the museum the inadequate use of Birkenau, which, he claimed, "illustrates the horror of the place far better than Auschwitz".[59] As a result of this pressure, the decision was taken to put up a monument in Birkenau.[60] In the summer of 1951, the MKiS announced a competition for the design of a monument "in memory of the victims of Auschwitz", to be raised in Birkenau.[61] Probably due to lack of funds, the winning design was never implemented.[62] Not until 1955, as part of the preparations for the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, was a modest monument in the form of an urn erected between the ruins of crematoria II and III[63]; in 1967, it was replaced by an International Monument to the Victims of Fascism.

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56 Paper by Stanisław Kłodziński on the subject of the Auschwitz Museum, no date (after 4 Aug. 1946), AAN, PZbWP 52.

57 See, inter alia: Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp in Oświęcim, no date (before Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13; "Oświęcim w krwi i walce. Jak będzie wyglądało muzeum", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947"; Ludwik Rajewski, "Kronika oświęcimska", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-31 Dec. 1948.

58 "Historia Oświęcimia utrwalona na wieki", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jul. 1947.

59 Leon Grosfeld to the secretary of the KC PZPR Edward Ochab, 30 Aug. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

60 Adam Kulik, Note regarding work on the reorganisation and expansion of the PMOB, 2 Dec. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

61 Announcement of a competition for designs for two monuments in Auschwitz and in Birkenau, 9 Aug. 1951, AAN, MKiS, Wydz. Twórczości Artystycznej 819.

62 Note regarding the article by Tadeusz Hołuj entitled "Sprawa wiecznej pamięci" (*Życie Literackie*, 30 Jan. 1955), AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Pomników i Muzeów Walki z Faszyzmem 21.

63 Note regarding the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, no date, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/356

Why is it, then, that despite the numerous plans to commemorate Birkenau that emerged in the years 1945-1952, none of these plans was ever implemented? Whereas for Jewish survivors the main symbol of wartime martyrdom was Birkenau, from the perspective of Polish political prisoners the two camps, Auschwitz I and II, were of equal significance. The status of Auschwitz I was elevated in the eyes of Polish political prisoners because it housed an icon of the camp resistance movement—the *Politische Abteilung* building (Block 11), with its bunker and Wall of Death where members of clandestine organisations had been executed. Nevertheless, the mass extermination of people that took place in Birkenau remained a context which could not be ignored, since it determined the status of the complex as a whole. It would likewise be difficult to prove that Polish political prisoners deliberately overlooked Birkenau in an effort to conceal the role that Auschwitz had played in the planned extermination of the Jews. The proposals described above testify rather to the fact that, for the museum staff and PPR/PZPR functionaries alike, Birkenau was seen primarily as a symbol of Polish or international martyrdom. One must assume, therefore, that the reasons for the failure to commemorate Birkenau were far more prosaic. Auschwitz I, located closer to the town of Oświęcim and comprising early 20th-century brick buildings formerly used by seasonal workers, was far better suited as a museum and as accommodation for museum staff than the shabby, dilapidated barracks of Birkenau.[64] The site was also much smaller and surrounded by a wall, thus easier to protect against looting.[65] Perhaps, too—although this is pure conjecture—the museum staff felt reluctant to come into close contact with Birkenau, since it was not just a place of crimes and suffering, but also, in the literal sense, a vast cemetery.

The failure to commemorate Birkenau not only marginalised the theme of the Holocaust but also ignored the fate of women who had been incarcerated there. Paradoxically, the most popular camp memoirs—Zofia Kossak-Szczucka's *From the Abyss*, Krystyna Żywulska's *I Survived Auschwitz*, Seweryna Szmaglewska's *Smoke over Birkenau*, as well as Wanda Jakubowska's famous film *The Last Stage*—all concerned the women's section of Birkenau.

The omission of Auschwitz II from the plans for the museum was also criticised in the press. In an article for *Tygodnik Powszechny* published in the autumn of 1947, Stanisław Stomma wrote that it was necessary to strike the right balance in the commemoration of Auschwitz I and Birkenau. The main emphasis, believed Stomma, should be on the latter, since Auschwitz I was merely a façade,

64 On the subject of the previous designation of the buildings of what was later to be Auschwitz I, see: Debórah Dwork, Robert-Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz von 1270 bis heute*, München 2000, p. 65.

65 For somewhat more on the subject of looting on the site of the former camp, particularly in Birkenau, see: Lechandro, *Zburzyć i zaorać?*, pp. 41-43.

and it was only in Birkenau that the true nature of the Nazis' plans could be understood.[66] Similar views were expressed by the ex-prisoner community. Soon after the museum had opened, an anonymous contributor to *Wolni Ludzie* complained that the site of the extermination camp had been completely neglected and was difficult to reach. "Would it not be infinitely more appropriate," she asked, "if all the documents, in all their terrible truthfulness, were housed in the place where they were essentially created; in the place where people with hair and people with prosthetic limbs went to the gas chambers, and where their true resting place is located? Europe's cemetery is Birkenau; it is not the few brick blocks of Auschwitz, a camp whose purpose from the start of the occupation was that people 'from the outside' should see it. Auschwitz's centre of gravity lay precisely in Birkenau: in the endless rows of stables, drowning throughout summer and winter in the muddy bog; where there was not a patch of greenery to be found; and where nothing perceptibly changed, save for the tongues of fire over the crematoria chimneys."[67]

It would seem, therefore, that the neglect of Birkenau was not caused by a deliberate attempt to marginalise the Holocaust, but was due, at least in part, to practical reasons. Nevertheless, it meant that, in the Auschwitz Museum, this chapter in the history of the camp was pushed into the background, forming only the backdrop to a story that found expression in Auschwitz I, and particularly in Block 11.

In the Background: Stutthof and Gross-Rosen

In contrast to the Majdanek Museum, which, despite losing out to Auschwitz still managed to keep going, other concentration camps within the borders of post-war Poland attracted very little interest from the government and the PZbWP and had to wait much longer to be even modestly commemorated. This is understandable to the extent that the authorities of a country ruined by war were simply unable to care for all martyrdom sites associated with the recent occupation. Initially, the PZbWP's Executive Board and the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom at the Ministry of Art and Culture encouraged the association's local branches to take the initiative. In an article published in the first issue of *Wolni Ludzie* in March 1946, Ludwik Rajewski called on local branches of the PZbWP to clean up and commemorate former camps. With the best will in the world, he explained, government institutions were not in a position to take care of all national martyrdom sites. For this reason, Rajewski exhorted his PZbWP colleagues, "we ourselves must play an active role in the campaign. Taking ad-

66 Stanisław Stomma, "Problem Oświęcimia", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 6 Jul. 1947.
67 "Śmierć Birkenau", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947.

vantage of this civic initiative, let us try, by our own means, to preserve as many camps as possible; to ensure that the sites are cleaned up and permanently protected; to bury the ashes of our dear comrades; and to mark off the crematorium as the central element of each site."[68] "We have the full support of the authorities in this regard," he promised readers. In practice, however, such initiatives could count on only very modest support from the Ministry and the PZbWP's Executive Board. In any case, for rank-and-file members of the PZbWP, too, the priority was to help former camp comrades and their families. Moreover, increasing central government interference in the commemoration campaign restricted the freedom to undertake grassroots initiatives, while the eradication of all the association's independent sources of income eventually starved such initiatives of funds. This process is well illustrated by the examples of Stutthof and Gross-Rosen.

In the spring of 1946, the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP submitted an application to the Provincial Land Office in which it requested that the site of the former Stutthof concentration camp be placed under the association's management.[69] The application stressed the particular importance of the place in the propaganda of the "Recovered Territories". The PZbWP, it read, "feels obliged and compelled to take care of this cemetery, whose very existence is the best evidence of the policy to deprive the Slavic lands of their national identity. This policy, once used by the Teutonic Knights in their white habits, was latterly used by the Nazis in their swastika armbands."[70] The applicants did not only want to commemorate the victims of the camp, however; they hoped that the infrastructure of the camp could be put to practical use in the association's self-help campaign, generating profit which could be used to finance the association's activities. Earlier, the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP had unsuccessfully tried to persuade the local administration to allocate a building for use as a holiday complex by the association's members and dependants. This time, however, the PZbWP hoped that the authorities would not reject the application, since it concerned the handing over of a site to former prisoners which they themselves had built and in which they had so greatly suffered. Recreational stays for former camp inmates were to be organised in Stutthof. There were also plans to set up workshops for association members and dependants.[71] The leadership of the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP assumed that the

68 Ludwik Rajewski, "Upamiętnienie martyrologii polskiej", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Mar. 1947.

69 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the Provincial Land Office in Gdańsk (official copy), 18 Apr. 1946, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31; Paper by the legal advisor for the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP on the matter of Stutthof, 20 Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

70 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the Provincial Land Office in Gdańsk (official copy), 18 Apr. 1946, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31.

71 ZO PZbWP to the ZG PZbWP, 24 Feb. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

income generated from the workshops and from the farm belonging to the camp would pay for the upkeep of a future museum.

In the absence of a response from the provincial authorities, in the autumn of 1946 the chairman of the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP, Lech Duszyński, contacted the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation in regard to Stutthof. The former camp buildings, he reported, were in a pitiful state. Some of the barracks in the new camp had been dismantled by the Social Construction Enterprise, while the old camp was now home to a branch of the State Automobile Works.[72] The association, wrote Duszyński, wanted to convert the SS buildings into an old people's home and a holiday complex for young people. "The old part of the camp, which accounts for barely one-fifteenth of the complex, could be preserved as a commemorative […]. This would allow us to use propaganda to influence foreigners arriving at the ports of Gdynia and Gdańsk by showing them the Germanisation methods used for hundreds of years to appropriate our western lands."[73]

After months of effort to secure the approval of the local and central authorities, in the spring of 1947 the District Office in Gdańsk finally handed over management of the Stutthof site to the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP.[74] In July of that year, however, the PZbWP's Executive Board withheld all subsidies for the renovation of the former camp buildings, arguing that the plan to create a sanatorium or workshop for former prisoners within the perimeter of the camp was somewhat ill-judged and in any case would require considerable funds.[75] It would seem, though, that the decision of the PZbWP leadership was not only underpinned by objections of a psychological-aesthetic nature or by economic calculation: it also reflected a general shift in the association's policy towards restricting commercial activities and self-help campaigns. As a result of the withdrawal of subsidies, the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP, which had in the meantime managed to renovate the former commandant's office, found itself on the verge of bankruptcy. In September 1947, Lech Duszyński was dismissed from the post of chairman of the Branch Executive Board on a charge of mismanagement, and subsequently

72 The "old camp" is that part of Stutthof whose construction was commenced in September 1939. Behind the old camp were a gas chamber and crematorium. Construction of the new camp was begun in 1942 (Ciechanowski, *Stutthof. Hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny*, pp. 105-115).

73 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation at the MKiS, 30 Sep. 1946, AAN, MKiS, CZM 31.

74 Delivery-acceptance protocol of the transferral by the State Automobile Works of the site of the former camp in Stutthof under the administration of the ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk, 30 Apr. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

75 AAN, PZbWP 108: ZG PZbWP to the Social Welfare Council (ROS), 9 Jul. 1947; ROS to the ZG PZbWP, 16 Jul. 1947.

arrested[76]; his fate perfectly illustrates the general atmosphere of "the struggle against profiteering" that had been unleashed within the association.

Shortly before his dismissal, Duszyński had contacted the PZbWP's Executive Board to enquire whether, given its refusal to subsidise the construction of a holiday complex, it could at least finance the work necessary to preserve and commemorate the site of the old camp.[77] The reply came from Warsaw that Stutthof could not count on receiving government subsidies, since the MKiS was not planning to establish a separate museum of martyrdom there[78]; such museums were to be created in Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Warsaw only. The Executive Board suggested, however, that the association could perhaps foot the bill from its own funds. A report prepared by the receivers in October 1947 stated that the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP, although severely in debt, had undertaken significant investment in Stutthof, which it would be a shame to waste: "The Branch Executive Board, aware of the gravity of the situation, has presented the salient facts to the Executive Board [in Warsaw] and has asked it to decide whether Stutthof should be preserved or whether it should be completely liquidated and left to its fate. [...] The Branch Executive Board believes that it is still necessary to maintain the facility in Stutthof; it is, in a sense, the association's moral duty."[79]

Under pressure from the association's leadership and the MKiS, in the spring of 1948 the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP finally abandoned its earlier plans; the former commandant's villa and commandant's office were taken over by the Ministry of Forestry, which was to convert them into a "living monument of martyrdom", namely, a vocational school for carpenters.[80] On the site of the old

76 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP, 23 Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108; Report by the receivers of the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP for the period Feb. 1947–Jan. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 101; Report on the inspection of the liquidation of former German assets in the former Stutthof concentration camp for the director of the Inspection Bureau affiliated to the Council of Ministers, no date, AAN, PZbWP 108; Director of the Inspection Bureau to the Prime Minister (official copy), 17 Oct. 1947, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31.

77 President of the ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP, 5 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

78 Official letter from the ZG PZbWP to the ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk, 13 Sep. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

79 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP, 23 Oct. 1947, AAN, PZbWP 108.

80 This project was never realised, and the site of the new camp along with the SS buildings was taken over in 1949 by a unit of the Border Defence Troops (Deputy Chairman of the PZbWP Bernard Fuksiewicz to the ZO PZbWP in Sopot, 14 Apr. 1948, AAN PZbWP 108; ZO PZbWP to the ZG PZbWP, 29 May 1948, AAN, PZbWP 108; ZG PZbWP to the Forestry Minister regarding the construction of a vocational school for carpenters at Stutthof, 18 Aug. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31; Report of the Economic Division of the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP for 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18).

camp, where the gas chamber and crematorium were located, the Branch Executive Board undertook to establish, with the help of the MKiS, a "dead monument of martyrdom".[81] Despite promises, however, the association never received any funds for this purpose.[82]

When, during a holiday to Pomerania in the summer of 1948, the historian and one-time Stutthof inmate Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz visited his former place of captivity, he was overcome with bitterness. While the former commandant's villa and commandant's office were in good condition and being used by employees of the Automobile Works and teenagers from the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP)—wrote Dunin-Wąsowicz in a piece of reportage published in *Wolni Ludzie* a few months later—"the old camp is in a pitiful state":

> All the barracks are still standing, but their condition is such that they are in imminent danger of total collapse. Ripped-out doors and windows, smashed roofs, name plates with German inscriptions scattered about, lots of equipment destroyed by rain, remnants of prisoners' clothing and shoes—in a word, it's one big ruin. [...] All that is left of the Jewish camp, the entire men's camp, and most of the DAWs (*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke*) is a few brick foundations. [...] Here and there one finds the remains of bunk beds bespattered with mud. Close by is a tall stack of mouldy shoes, and near to that a pile of equally rotten striped uniforms. The whole scene creates a sorry impression of total abandonment and neglect.[83]

It would be impossible, admitted the author, to preserve the entire site or to restore it "to the condition it was in a few years ago". But at the very least, wrote Dunin-Wąsowicz, the oldest part of the camp "should be treated as a museum of Polish martyrdom in these lands".

Due to lack of funds, at the beginning of 1949 the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP abandoned its claims to the site of the old camp, too, which came under the direct management of the MKiS.[84] The decision was taken to dismantle most of the barracks and to preserve only the most symbolic elements of the camp: the gas chamber, crematorium, entrance gates, and fence. On the newly-created clearing, a small monument

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81 Official letters from the ZO PZbWP Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP dated 4 May, 29 May and 3 Jun. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 108; Head of the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation, Witold Kieszkowski, to the Inspection Bureau affiliated to the Council of State, 16 Oct. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31.

82 ZO PZbWP in Gdańsk to the ZG PZbWP, 20 Nov. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 108.

83 Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, "Nasze sprawy. Stutthof zapomniany", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Nov. 1948.

84 ZG PZbWP to the MKiS, 21 Mar. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 108; Report of the Economic Division of the Gdańsk Branch of the PZbWP for 1949, AAN, PZbWP 18; Delivery-acceptance protocol for the handover of the site of the "Old Camp" in Stutthof to the MKiS (official copy), 27 Jul. 1949, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 31.

was to be erected. Over the next two years the site of the camp was indeed cleaned up[85], but the museum and monument in Stutthof were not built until the 1960s.

The fortunes of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp were somewhat different. The site of camp was vacated by Red Army units in the spring of 1946[86], and it remained abandoned for over a year. It was not until the autumn of 1947, at the initiative of the PZbWP's local branch in Świdnica, that a Committee for the Preservation of Gross-Rosen was established. Thanks to the committee's intervention, in October of that year the Provincial Office in Wrocław sent an inspector to visit Gross-Rosen. He reported that the site "is in a wretched state and resembles a giant rubbish dump":

> [...] most of the barracks, with a few exceptions, have been dismantled and removed. Within the camp and on the roads leading up to it one encounters horse-drawn carts, lorries, and tractors with trailers carrying the remnants of barracks and other building materials; at the train station, waiting at a siding, is an entire goods train in the process of being loaded […] There is only one guard from ORMO [Volunteer Reserve Militia], and he is unable to do anything […]; his work is limited to checking the permits issued by various authorities, such as the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Reconstruction, or the Quarries Directorate in Świdnica. But even these checks cannot be rigorous if, on any given day, sixty carts arrive to remove materials for use as fuel.[87]

The reluctance of the central authorities to become involved in the plan to commemorate Gross-Rosen is attested by a letter sent at the end of 1947 to the PZbWP's Executive Board from the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom. The authors noted that there already existed two camp museums—in Auschwitz and in Majdanek—and that a Central Museum of Polish Martyrdom was being planned in Warsaw. The MKiS, they continued, "does not envisage a greater number of museums, both for financial reasons and because we do not wish to fragment the issue of martyrdom across several small provincial museums, but rather to illustrate it, as comprehensively and accurately as possible, in the three most important centres".[88] Consequently, in the 1948 budget, no expenditure was allocated for cleaning up Gross-Rosen. In light of the disastrous condition of the former camp, however, the Department offered to prepare, free of charge, a design for the monument and a plan for the development of the site;

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85 On the subject of the state of the remnants of the former camp in 1950, see: Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, "Stutthof po pięciu latach", *Za Wolność i Lud*, 1-15 Apr. 1950.

86 Protocol of an inspection of the site of the former Gross-Rosen concentration camp drawn up by Michał Zieliński, a representative of the Provincial Department for Reconstruction in Wrocław, 10 Oct. 1947, AAN, MKiS, CZM. Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

87 Ibid.

88 Dept for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom to the ZG PZbWP, 16 Dec. 1947, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

the cost of implementing the plan was to be covered "by society".[89] In this way, the MKiS tried to maintain control over the way in which Gross-Rosen was commemorated without incurring any additional expenditure.

In November 1947, on All Souls' Day, the Committee for the Preservation of Gross-Rosen organised the first reunion of former camp inmates, during which the foundation stone for the planned mausoleum was laid.[90] Thereafter, the committee operated under the new name of the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum; co-opted into it, aside from members of the PZbWP, were representatives of the local administration and social and political organisations, including the district governor, the secretary of the PPR's District Committee, and a representative of the local Jewish Committee.[91] In April 1948, the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum notified the PZbWP's Executive Board that a competition for the design of the monument had been announced amongst members of the Wrocław branch of the Polish Architects' Association (SARP). The committee also asked the PZbWP for permission to conduct a nationwide appeal in order to collect money for the mausoleum: "We believe that it is our sacred duty to pass on to posterity that which is finest in our Nation, that is, the great sacrifice of life made by the Heroes of the former camp; to honour Their memory, the dead and the living; and, by raising a Mausoleum, to reveal to the whole world the 20th-century crimes and ignominy of the *kulturträger* from the West."[92]

However, work on cleaning up and commemorating the site of the former camp came to a standstill. Perhaps the committee proved apathetic or was unable to secure the necessary funds. It is also possible that the project was blocked by the PZbWP leadership and by the Ministry of Art and Culture, which were slowly tightening their grip over grassroots initiatives. In the spring of 1949, a meeting took place between members of the committee and representatives of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, during which it was once again decided to preserve the most important remnants of the camp. The MKiS representatives agreed to cover part of the costs of the project.[93] The first

89 Letter from the National Directorate for Museums to the Provincial Conservator of Monuments in Wrocław, 17 Oct. 1947, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

90 S. Matuszak, "Gross-Rosen", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Nov. 1947.

91 Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum affiliated to the Board of the local branch of the PZbWP in Świdnica to the ZG PZbWP, 1 Apr. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

92 Ibid.

93 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum with the participation of MKiS delegates Ludwik Rajewski and Ewa Śliwińska, 28 Apr. 1949, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

phase of the clean-up was completed at the beginning of 1950[94], but this did not improve the situation as expected. An article for the magazine of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (ZBoWiD), *Za Wolność i Lud* [For Freedom and the People], reported as follows:

> One enters the site of the former concentration camp through a wooden gate, above which rises a small sentry tower. Just beyond the gate and the torn-up barbed wire extends a mass of charred ruins. Weeds have proliferated and now cover everything—from the remnants of the wooden barracks to the streets and squares of the camp, once so meticulously maintained... Gradually and inevitably, the Gross-Rosen camp is decaying.[95]

Since the Ministry of Art and Culture did not approve of the committee's proposals to commemorate the camp, it commissioned a new project.[96] The latter was not implemented until 1953, after further cuts to the budget.[97]

Forgotten Places: Chełmno, Bełżec, Treblinka, Sobibór

While Stutthof and Gross-Rosen could still count on local branches of the PZbWP showing an interest in their fate, the former extermination camps of Chełmno, Bełżec, Treblinka and Sobibór did not even figure on the map of Polish martyrdom sites at that time and were only visited by people searching for gold or other valuables.[98] The reasons for this were manifold. First, the Nazis began to liqui-

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94 Minutes of the meeting of the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum, 27 Jan. 1950, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29.

95 Korotko, "Gross-Rosen", *Za Wolność i Lud*, 1-15 Apr. 1950.

96 AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 29: Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum to the National Directorate for Museums and Conservation at the MKiS, 19 Oct. 1949; Dept for Museums and Monuments of Struggle and Martyrdom to the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum, 14 Nov. 1949; National Directorate for Museums and Conservation to the Committee for the Construction of the Gross-Rosen Mausoleum, 7 Feb. 1950.

97 Note regarding the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, no date (spring 1955), KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/356; Henryk Poznański, Report on the work of the Dept for Museums and Monuments of the Struggle against Fascism, no date (1953), AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81). See also: Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, p. 242. The State Museum at Gross-Rosen was not officially established until 1983.

98 On the subject of looting on the site of Treblinka see: Martyna Rusiniak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1944-1989)*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 30-33; idem, "Treblinka—Eldorado Podlasia", *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2 (2006); Piotr Głuchowski and

date the extermination camps during the war.[99] To obliterate all evidence of their crimes, the SS ordered camp buildings to be demolished and the land beneath them to be levelled; the corpses of victims were incinerated and their ashes scattered. Thus, in contrast to Majdanek, Auschwitz, Stutthof and Gross-Rosen, at the sites of former extermination camps no remnants were preserved aside from victims' ashes. Second, very few people survived to bear witness to what had happened and attempt to have those sites commemorated.[100] Another important factor was that extermination camps were places exclusively associated with Jewish martyrdom.

The only institutions interested in the fate of such sites were the CKŻP, the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH), and the Jewish Religious Congregation. The issue of preserving and commemorating the sites of former extermination camps was discussed time and again by the Presidium of the CKŻP. Sometimes the presidium members also mentioned the need to preserve the remnants of the labour camps in Poniatowa and Trawniki. Several interventions were made with the National Homeland Council, the Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Art and Culture; CKŻP representatives also raised the issue at meetings of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites.[101] However, all these efforts came to nothing. In any case, Jewish institutions, too, were more engaged in the commemoration of Majdanek and, above all, Auschwitz, which—because it

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Marcin Kowalski, "Gorączka złota w Treblince", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 Jan. 2008 (*Duży Format*). The problem of plundering and profanation of graves was not confined to the death camps. As already mentioned in this chapter, virtually all the sites of the former concentration camps, Gross-Rosen, Stutthof, Majdanek and Auschwitz, fell victim to looting by both private individuals and state institutions.

99 The death camp in Bełżec was liquidated in June, Treblinka II in November, and Sobibór in November/October 1943. The death camp in Chełmno was ultimately liquidated in September 1944. Yitzhak Arad, *Bełżec, Sobibor, Treblinka. The Operation Reinhard Death Camps*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987.

100 Around 70 former inmates of Treblinka II survived the war (Afterword by Andrzej Żbikowski to Samuel Willenberg, *Bunt w Treblince*, Warszawa 2004, p. 174), Schelivis reports that 47 people survived Sobibór, most of them Polish Jews (Jules Schelivis, *Vernichtungslager Sobibór*, Berlin 1998, pp. 201-203, 284-293). Only two survivors of Bełżec are known, one of whom was murdered in 1946 (Robert Kuwałek, *Obóz zagłady w Bełżcu*, Lublin-Bełżec 2005, p. 63). Three prisoners managed to escape from Chełmno (Shmuel Krakowski, "Zarys dziejów obozu w Chełmnie nad Nerem" in *Mówią świadkowie Chełmna*, Konin-Łódź 2004, p. 16).

101 See, inter alia: Minutes of the meetings of the KRN on 21-23 Jul. 1945, AAN, KRN, Wydz. Prezydialny 10 (mkf. B-7679); Memorandum from the CŻKH to the Dept for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, 14 Jul. 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 3030/XX/109; Minutes of the meeting of the ROPWiM, 23-24 Mar. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 1A.

was known both in Poland and abroad—soon became a source of rivalry amongst various groups of victims. In addition, the CKŻP was keen to bear witness not only to the suffering but also to the heroism of the Jewish nation. Perhaps for this reason, much more money and energy was invested in constructing the Warsaw Ghetto Monument (1948) than in commemorating the sites of former extermination camps. For the former project, Polish Jews could also count on much greater support from the American diaspora and from the *Yishuv*.

The CŻKP showed greatest determination in regard to the commemoration of Treblinka as the place where the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto were exterminated. A detailed plan for a memorial was prepared at the turn of 1947/1948 but never implemented. I shall return to this issue in the final chapter.

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Poland was not the only country where memorial museums arose on the sites of former concentration camps. Open-air museums similar to those in Majdanek and Auschwitz were created at Terezin (*Theresienstadt*, 1947) in Czechoslovakia and at Mauthausen (1949) in Austria.[102] The history of camps located within the post-war borders of Germany was somewhat different, with most not being commemorated until the 1950s or 1960s. As Bertrand Perz writes, whereas in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Austria, which for years was seen as the "first victim" of National Socialism, the commemoration of sites associated with Nazi crimes contributed to social consolidation, in East and West Germany—despite the major differences between the two countries—it necessarily exacerbated internal conflicts.[103]

Barely a few weeks after the liberation of Buchenwald, one former inmate—a Jew named Werner A. Beckert—put forward a proposal that the site of the camp be preserved as an international memorial.[104] The plan proved abortive, however, as Buchenwald was transformed into a Soviet special camp once Thuringia had passed from American to Soviet control. It was not until late 1951, after the camp had been closed and the site placed under the administration of the GDR, that the idea of creating a memorial museum resurfaced. In December 1953, the Central

102 On the subject of Terezin, see: *Národní hřbitov v Terezíné*, Pardubice 1990; Wilma Iggers, "Tschechoslowakei/Tschechien. Das verlorene Paradies" in *Mythen der Nationen*, pp. 782-785. On the subject of the post-war history of Mauthausen, see: Bertrand Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Innsbruck 2006.

103 Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen*, p. 15.

104 On the subject of the genesis of Buchenwald as a site of memory, see: Manfred Overesch, *Buchenwald und die DDR oder die Suche nach Selbstlegitimation*, Göttingen 1995; Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg"; idem, "Buchenwald" in Detlef Hoffmann (ed.) *Das Gedächtnis der Dinge. KZ-Relikte und KZ-Denkmäler 1945-1995*, Frankfurt am Main/NY 1998.

Committee of the SED passed a resolution to commemorate the sites of the former concentration camps at Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, and Hohenstein. Manfred Overesch rightly notes that the new-found interest of the East German authorities in commemorating former concentration camps, particularly Buchenwald, was connected with the crisis of legitimacy caused by the uprising of 17 June 1953.[105] The SED hoped to win broad public support by propagating the myth that the GDR had been born of the anti-fascist resistance movement within the camps. In 1954, the first museum exhibition was opened in Buchenwald; four years later, on the opposite slope of the Ettersberg, a huge monument in honour of the heroes of the camp resistance movement was erected.

The story of Ravensbrück was similar. In 1948, a group of women prisoners made an appeal for the former camp to be commemorated.[106] That same year, in the vicinity of the crematorium, a provisional monument was erected in the form of an obelisk crowned by a burning candle. A shortage of funds and the lack of interest shown by the local and central authorities meant that the museum was not opened until ten years later, in 1959.

In West Germany, the commemoration of former concentration camps commenced later still. The first memorial museum to be created was in Dachau in 1965. Although in the autumn of 1945 former inmates had set up a small exhibition on the history of the camp in the former crematorium building, this was closed in 1953 upon the intervention of the Bavarian authorities. Until 1948, the other buildings housed an American camp for Nazi war criminals[107]; after this closed, the barracks became home to ethnic Germans displaced from Czechoslovakia. It was not until 1963, under pressure from former inmates, that Dachau was officially recognised as a memorial and place of remembrance. Work on cleaning up and commemorating the former camp was completed in 1965.

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105 Overesch, *Buchenwald und die DDR*, p. 298.

106 On the subject of the history of the creation of a site of memory in Ravensbrück, see: Schwarz Erika, Steppen Simone, "Entstehung der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, 1945-1959" in Eschebach Insa, Jacobeit Sigrid and Laurence Susanne (eds) *Die Sprache des Gedenkens. Zur Geschichte der Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück 1945-1995*, Berlin 1999.

107 On the subject of the postwar history of Dachau, see the excellent work by Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau.*

Chapter 5
Disputes over the Method of Commemorating the Sites of Former Concentration Camps

In the previous chapter I discussed which concentration camps and death camps were commemorated in Poland, which ones were not, and the reasons behind these decisions. My analysis shall now turn to the disputes that arose over the form and content of remembrance. To some extent these disputes reflect the discussions and conflicts over the interpretation of the wartime experience, particularly the experience of the camps, which were addressed in the first part of the book. This chapter tackles the question of how the theoretical debates translated into visual forms of remembrance.

The history of the first monuments and museum exhibitions points to a relative pluralism in historical debate during the 1944-1948/1949 period, and to the gradual monopolising of that debate by the authorities towards the end of the decade. Here, too, one observes a departure from the remembrance of crimes and suffering in favour of an "heroic" narrative. Analysing the memorial projects from that period, one also sees how the subject of the Holocaust, which was still present in Polish public debate during the immediate post-war period, gradually became taboo. Many of the controversies described below, however, did not follow the lines of division between particular "memory groups" or political parties; rather, they reflected the broader crisis of European culture caused by the experience of the Second World War—an experience for which the traditional arsenal of forms and symbols had no adequate means of expression. It is no surprise, therefore, that similar discussions were taking place concurrently in other parts of Europe.

"Evidence of Crimes" or "A Collection of Curiosities"?

For many people in Poland and in other European countries there was an obvious need to commemorate the sites of former concentration camps and to create museums that would document the crimes which had taken place there. Yet no prototype existed for the "museums of martyrdom" established soon after the war. Hitherto, the purpose of historical museums had been rather to commemorate the positive events in the history of a given community. In the modern era, writes

Krzysztof Pomian, museums have become temples of secularism in which "the nation gives perpetual homage to itself by celebrating every aspect of its past, each and every one of its social, geographical and professional groups which it believes has contributed to its general prosperity, and all the great men born on its soil and who have left lasting works in every domain imaginable. Even objects from other societies or from nature render the nation which has collected them more illustrious, since this shows it has recognized their value, via its artists, scholars, explorers, even its generals, and has even been able to make sacrifices in order to acquire them."[1] By contrast, in the history of those "traumatic places" (*traumatische Orte*)—a term used by the German historian Aleida Assmann to describe the sites of former concentration camps—it was difficult to discern a positive message.[2] Even when attempts were made to turn former concentration camps into symbols of the victory of good over evil, of Slavs over Germans, or of socialism over fascism, capitalism and imperialism, they nonetheless remained places of crimes and suffering above all else. Already in the 1940s there was an awareness that the Auschwitz Museum was a museum "the like of which has never existed on this earth before" and that it had "no prototype or precedent in history".[3]

Very soon it also became apparent that, contrary to expectations, the remnants of former camps did not speak for themselves, that their authenticity might not just facilitate but also hinder the transfer of historical knowledge. More than half a century later, this problem is still present. Ruth Klüger, a former inmate of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz-Birkenau, writes about it as follows:

> I once visited Dachau with some Americans who had asked me to come along. It was a clean and proper place, and it would have taken more imagination than your average John or Jane Doe possesses to visualize the camp as it was forty years earlier. Today a fresh wind blows across the central square where the infamous roll calls took place, and the simple barracks of stone and wood suggest a youth hostel more easily than a setting for tortured lives. Surely some visitors secretly figure they can remember times when they have been worse off than the prisoners of this orderly German camp. [...] Sure, the signs and the documentation and the films help us to understand. But the concentration camp as a memorial site? Landscapes, seascapes—there should be a

1 Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800*, Cambridge UK–Cambridge Mass. 1990, p. 44.

2 "Traumatic places," writes Assmann, "differ from sites of memory in not yielding to attempts to lend them a simple, affirmative meaning. Religious and national memory abounds in blood and sacrifice, yet these recollections are not of a traumatic character, for they are branded with a normative imprint and help to make sense of individual and collective fate" (Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 1999, pp. 328-329).

3 Zofia Żorecka, "Wiedza oświęcimska", *Odra*, 29 Aug. 1948.

> word like *timescape* to indicate the nature of a place in time, that is, at a certain time, neither before nor after.[4]

Although the problem of how to communicate the experience of the camps in an authentic way might have seemed less pressing in the 1940s than it does today, when the last witnesses to those events are dying out, the issue was nevertheless a subject of public debate.

Both in Poland and abroad, many concentration camps were opened to the public soon after liberation. In areas of Germany and Austria occupied by the Americans, mandatory visits to concentration camps were organised for local people, who were also employed to bury the corpses of the victims.[5] This was an element of the "re-education" programme for German and Austrian society. In the eastern occupation zone of Germany, and in Poland, too, German civilians and Wehrmacht soldiers frequently participated in the exhumation of bodies and in the cleaning up of former concentration camp sites.[6] At the same time, the sites became places of pilgrimage for Poles who wanted to see for themselves evidence of the crimes that had been committed there and to honour the dead. However, once the former inmates had left, the corpses of the victims had been buried and their possessions removed, the sites soon lost their aura of horror. For those who had not experienced incarceration themselves, the sites became incoherent. Therefore, exhibitions documenting Nazi crimes were set up in the camps soon after their liberation. These first "museums of martyrdom", in the creation of which former inmates frequently participated, were often highly explicit and extreme. As early as in 1945, in Dachau and Buchenwald, both of which had been liberated by the Americans, there were exhibitions in which life-size models dressed in prisoners' striped uniforms or SS uniforms demonstrated the use of instruments of torture.[7] Propaganda films, posters, and information brochures distributed throughout the western occupation zones of Germany showed shocking photographs of victims' remains or the emaciated bodies of survivors, often accompanied by captions that blamed German society for these atrocities.[8]

Soon it was realised, however, that such ghastly images were not fulfilling their desired educational purpose, and far from eliciting remorse they aroused

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4 Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive. A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, New York 2003, p. 67.

5 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, pp. 55-57, 421-422; Overesch, *Buchenwald und die DDR*, pp. 106-109; Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen* (chapter I).

6 Schwarz, Steppen, "Entstehung der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück", p. 219.

7 Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg", pp. 9-13; Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, pp. 170-173, fig. 17.

8 Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945*, Berlin 1998, pp. 58-78.

disbelief and defensive responses in the viewer, which, in turn, led to the relativisation of crimes and the abrogation of personal responsibility. As early as in May 1945, General Omar Bradley advised Dwight Eisenhower, the commander of the US occupation forces in Germany, to close Buchenwald to the public. Bradley claimed that, despite the life-size models placed around the camp, Buchenwald no longer made a convincing impression now that the human corpses had been removed and the survivors had been transported to hospital:

> Buchenwald Concentration Camp has been completed to such an extent that very little evidence of atrocities remains. This negates any educational value of having various groups visit this camp to secure first hand information of German atrocities. In fact, many feel quite skeptical that previous conditions actually existed.[9]

Bradley's concerns about the effectiveness of such educational methods were confirmed a month later when the Psychological Warfare Division commissioned the sociologist Morris Janowitz to conduct a survey of German reactions to an information brochure containing photographs of concentration camps liberated by the Americans.[10] Janowitz's analysis showed that the majority of respondents either questioned the credibility of the publication or—if they accepted the facts contained therein—denied all personal responsibility and attributed all the blame to the leaders of the Third Reich. In the absence of an alternative strategy, however, the propaganda campaign was continued despite the unsatisfactory results. The American experience was a negative point of reference in Polish debates on the commemoration of former concentration camps.

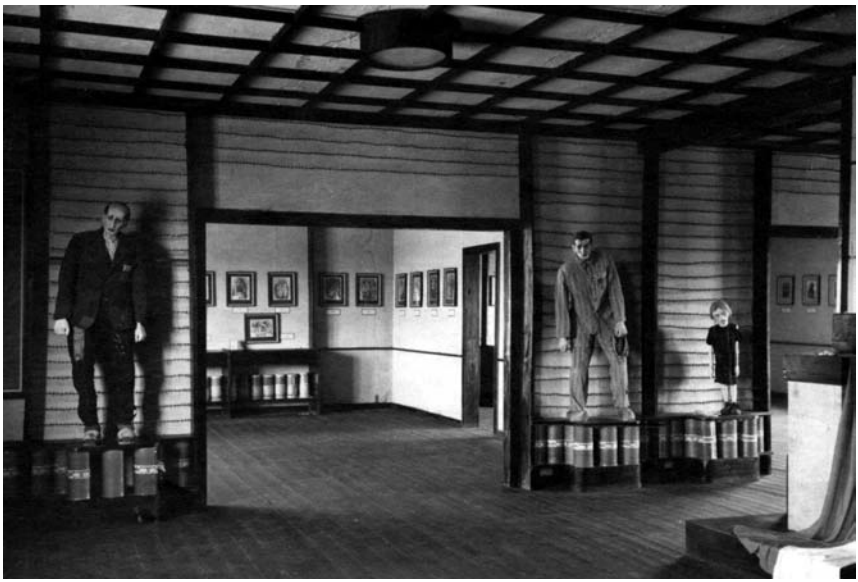
Although similar museums and publications in Poland were directed at a different audience and were not intended to arouse feelings of guilt or responsibility but rather to commemorate the victims and bring the perpetrators to justice, here, too, the realities of camp life were recreated in the most vivid way possible. In one of the first designs for the Majdanek Museum drawn up in November 1944—thus, nearly six months after the liberation of Dachau and Buchenwald—Antoni Ferski wrote: "What took place in the death camp will be visually recreated by means of wax figures in all the places of execution."[11] The director of the museum planned to include the following scenes, among others: "several people with a look of fear in their eyes, dressed in striped uniforms, standing before a Gestapo officer holding a whip, while beside him a dog tears at the body of one of the unfortunates"; "a Gestapo officer snatching an infant from its mother's arms"; "several people

9 Quoted after: Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg", p. 13.

10 Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung*, pp. 84-93. Cf. also: Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, pp. 59-64.

11 Director of the PMM, Antoni Ferski, to the chairman of the PKWN, Edward Osóbka-Morawski, 12 Nov. 1944, APMM, AZ I/1. Document published in: *Powstanie Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku*, pp. 11-14.

lying dead in a gas chamber, poisoned by Zyklon B". Such an arrangement, Ferski explained, would make visitors aware of "the enormity of the terror which prevailed at Majdanek" and enable them to feel as if they had been prisoners themselves. "A visitor to the museum will experience the horror of a day in the camp, whose purpose was to exterminate non-German people."



Interior view of the first exhibition at Majdanek, opened in September 1945 (courtesy of APMM).

Whether on moral and aesthetic grounds, or for financial reasons, Ferski's design was never fully implemented. However, at the first exhibition, which opened at Majdanek in September 1945, life-size models depicting camp inmates were used.[12] Concerns were raised in the Polish press that such a method of presenting the history of the camp might provide fuel for sensation seekers and lead to the profanation of places rightly regarded as symbolic—and in many cases, actual—cemeteries of the victims of Nazi terror. In an article for *Tydzień* [The Week], Jerzy Wyszomirski relayed his impressions from a visit to Majdanek in September 1946:

> There are decaying shoes and sets of striped uniforms with the appropriate letters and symbols sewn on, and a burial mound built of "compost" with a cross on top. In the

12 Photograph of the interior of an exhibition barrack, APMM, Fotografie, Kolekcja nr 6 (Wydarzenia w Muzeum 1944-1948), 6.45.1.10.

> huge barrack, which once housed the shoemakers' workshops, numerous "exhibits" are to be found: lists of the deceased, charts, statistics, miscellaneous objects, pictures, prints, photographs, skulls, Zyklon B canisters, etc. There are also life-size figures of prisoners (of wax? plaster? plasticine?), to whose faces the artist has rather primitively given a look of exhaustion and suffering. Amongst these figures are a Jew and a Pole, and a woman with a small child, all dressed in regulation prison uniform and wearing clogs on their rotting feet. From a distance they give the impression of living people—or, rather, of ghosts from the afterworld; up close, instead of sympathy and compassion, they evoke horror and disgust.[13]

Majdanek, lamented Wyszomirski, far from being a "symbol of suffering and despair", recalled the "Musée Grévin and Les Oubliettes in Paris, where for a few francs one could observe various macabre scenes: medieval torture, wax figures being torn apart by horses, wax effigies being guillotined (as if they were living people), etc.".

These initial negative experiences meant that, when planning further exhibitions both at Majdanek and at Auschwitz, care was taken not to shock visitors with atrocities. The Auschwitz Museum, declared a proposal published in June 1947 in *Wolni Ludzie*, "must bear witness to the truth without creating a horror show or a Grand Guignol through the use of visual effects".[14] Direct reference was also made to the American propaganda campaign in the western occupation zones of Germany. In an article published in *Robotnik* to mark the official opening of the museum, Wanda Kragen praised its creators because they had:

> rejected the facile approach: the overt presentation of the horrors which prevailed at the camp, the approach of the Grand Guignol or some sort of American Museum of Second World War Atrocities—in other words, the presentation of facts through the use of, for instance, wax figures to illustrate flogging, hanging, reverse hanging, the "standing cell", execution by firing squad, or even suffocation in a gas chamber, or to show people as walking skeletons. That would defeat the purpose and undermine the gravitas of this type of museum. Instead, [the creators of the museum] have chosen a more difficult path, one that engages the viewer's imagination, namely, the path of meticulous documentation, of statistical graphs and maps revealing the Germans' plans for the expansion of the camp, and of exhibits in the form of inanimate objects as the only vestiges of living beings."[15]

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13 Jerzy Wyszomirski, "Majdanek przeobrażony", *Tydzień*, 6 Oct. 1946.

14 "Oświęcim w krwi i walce", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947. Cf. also: Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp in Oświęcim, no date (przed 14 Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13.

15 Wanda Kragen, "W dniu otwarcia muzeum w Oświęcimiu. Obóz koncentracyjny przekształca się w muzeum", *Robotnik*, 16 Jun. 1947 (cited after: Lechandro, *Zburzyć i zaorać?*, pp. 213-220).

Stanisław Stomma also appreciated the "realism and discretion" of the Auschwitz exhibition. In an article published in July 1947 in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, he wrote: "Auschwitz needs no retouching, nor does it require anything designed to create a particular mood. It is enough to show people the truth. That is why, as far as is possible, we should leave Auschwitz just as it was. Facts alone convey the most powerful message. And the tragic pathos of facts does not need to be supplemented or enhanced through the creation of a particular mood by ersatz means. Otherwise, successful artistic ideas will only weaken and distort the message conveyed by naked facts."[16]

However, the Auschwitz exhibition came in for criticism, too. Some observers doubted whether the remnants of the camp, now tidied up and restored, would properly communicate the truth about Nazi concentration camps in general or whether, on the contrary, they would belittle the crimes that had been committed there. In a text published in the autumn of 1948 in *Przekrój* [The Review], Kazimierz Koźniewski argued that once the generation that knew Auschwitz from personal experience had died out, it would be necessary to close the museum and even dismantle the camp buildings, leaving only a symbolic cemetery in their place. Even now, claimed Koźniewski, the museum was unable to convey the true horror of Auschwitz; visitors could only see the "external framework" of the camp, which diminished its importance: "One could introduce entirely different content into this very same framework […]. The essence of Auschwitz was the system of mass murder. That is why it is inappropriate only to show the external elements; to preserve, in a mechanical way, the layout of the bunks, the innocuous signs, the paths, the blocks, even the barbed wire, whilst ignoring the realities of camp life. Many things have vanished: the mass of human beings, the terrible overcrowding, the squalor, the noise, the SS officers executing inmates on the slightest whim. There is no hunger or fear, no mutual suspicion or recrimination; human suffering is absent. All that remains is manicured lawns and cavalry barracks."[17] According to Koźniewski, another reason why Auschwitz made such an innocent impression was the fact that everything had been tidied up and repaired. The paradox lay in the fact that "the museum requires restoration, yet horror is not something that can be restored". For this reason Koźniewski felt that the completely neglected Birkenau had a far stronger impact. "This is an unresolvable contradiction," he concluded. "Despite its apparent authenticity, Auschwitz as a museum does not do justice to the real Auschwitz; it falsifies it. Former inmates are deluding themselves if they think that the world looks at the camp through their eyes; the world looks at it differently with each year that passes, as it recovers from the sickness of war and Nazism. Ever fewer people will believe in the truth about Auschwitz, the

16 Stanisław Stomma, "Problem Oświęcimia", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 6 Jul. 1947.

17 Kazimierz Koźniewski, "Drażliwy problem", *Przekrój*, 12-18 Sep. 1948.

truth about that system, when they visit the museum. Indeed, the museum dispels even the horror of legend. And therein lies the danger."

Koźniewski's article provoked a lively response from the ex-prisoner community and museum staff alike. The notion that the institution would eventually need to be closed raised the greatest concern. As one appalled reader wrote in a letter to the editor of *Wolni Ludzie*, the closure of the museum would "most definitely appeal to 'denazified' war criminals!"[18] At a meeting of the Expert Committee of the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites held in November 1948, Jan Sehn compared Koźniewski's idea to the SS wishing to eradicate all traces of their crimes.[19]

Nevertheless, there were voices in support of Koźniewski as well. Some suggested that the PMOB should be closed down as soon as possible and the land returned to its pre-war owners, who had no means of supporting themselves[20]; others challenged the very idea of creating that kind of institution. If the Auschwitz Museum was not just "one big mistake", read a contribution to *Kuźnica* [The Forge] published in the autumn of 1948, then at least the view, "which many of our 'patriots' endorse", that the museum should be seen by every foreigner, was simply mistaken.[21] The author of the text shared Koźniewski's belief that it was impossible to recreate the horror of Auschwitz; without it, he argued, the museum appeared "dull" and "tedious", especially to those who had no emotional connection with the camp, and did not arouse the expected response in the visiting public.

Other participants in the debate took a more measured approach, but they too, following Koźniewski, claimed that the PMOB was not fulfilling its intended educational purpose and only had meaning for former inmates. In an article for *Wolni Ludzie*, Jerzy Krygier wrote that the Auschwitz Museum had been designed, on the one hand, "as a memorial to those who survived and to those who perished" and, on the other, as a record of Nazi crimes.[22] Unfortunately, and in Krygier's view—entirely predictably, it had only been possible to achieve the first of these aims. For it was not possible "to preserve a festering wound on a healthy organism. Sooner or later it will heal, leaving only a barely visible scar." Krygier's solution, therefore, was to "cease to preserve the remnants of Auschwitz by artificial means. And not only that. We should eliminate everything which—as practice

18 Tadeusz Korczak, "Czy zburzyć i zaorać? W odpowiedzi na drażliwy problem", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Nov. 1948.

19 Minutes from the conference of the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM, Oświęcim 19-21 Nov. 1948, APMM, AZ I/14.

20 "Bez ogródek. Szybciej decydować" (jas.), *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 10 Oct. 1948.

21 "Słuszny artykuł" (r.m.), *Kuźnica*, 26 Sep. 1948.

22 Jerzy Krygier, "Czy zburzyć i zaorać? W odpowiedzi na 'Drażliwy problem'", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15-30 Oct. 1948.

shows—affects people who have no direct experience of the camp differently than was intended." This would not be tantamount to forgetting Auschwitz: the open-air museum could be replaced by an historical museum based on documentation gathered by the GKBZNwP and by a huge mausoleum dedicated to the memory of the victims or a giant cemetery. Eugenia Kocwa, too, was concerned that the Auschwitz Museum might not be able to communicate the horror of the place and that it risked becoming a "macabre collection of curiosities". In Auschwitz, wrote the former Ravensbrück inmate, it was above all necessary to honour the memory of the victims; a museum, on the other hand, particularly a museum of crimes, was an artificial construct compared to a cemetery, which is perhaps why the idea of it "finds little public support".[23]

Although they rejected the idea of closing the PMOB, certain other authors agreed that the museum needed to be redesigned. In the autumn of 1949, a long article by Jan Paweł Gawlik appeared in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, in which the author drew attention to the fact that Auschwitz would increasingly be visited by people who had no personal experience of the war or occupation and that the museum should be adapted to suit the needs of such people. We, contemporary Poles, he wrote:

> survived six years of occupation. We witnessed the mass executions of Jews. We were in Majdanek a few days after its liberation, and as we approached the crematorium, taking care not to tread on the corpses, we realised that the piles of coarse grey powder next to the ovens were in fact piles of human ash. After all those experiences, today, standing within the walls of the museum and seeing the intact accessories of crimes, we are able to imagine what went on and the horror of those days. But could the same be said of the sceptical Englishman, American or Swiss, for whom [Wanda Jakubowska's] *The Last Stage* is just exalted hyperbole? Future generations raised in an atmosphere of respect for others—generations who did not experience the Nazi occupation of Poland at first hand—will not understand the meaning of Auschwitz on the basis of memorabilia as they are shown in the museum."[24]

The Auschwitz Museum, warned Gawlik, should clearly not become a "cabinet of horrors"; uninformed tourists had to be introduced to the history of the place somehow. For this reason, the open-air museum needed a conceptual framework. The remnants on display had to be accompanied by a thematic exhibition consisting of expert commentaries, documents from the period, and witness testimonies. Only after viewing this exhibition "should the visitor be confronted with the authentic remnants, for then he will not approach them with feather-brained curiosity, as is often the case now. He will stand before them as if before a holy relic."

The defenders of the museum, the majority of whom were staff and former inmates, emphasised that the camp was above all a place of pilgrimage for the families

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23 Eugenia Kocwa, "Oświęcimskie krzyże", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 Mar. 1950.

24 Jan Paweł Gawlik, "Uwagi o muzeum zbrodni", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 Sep. 1949.

of the victims, who visited the "Auschwitz open-air museum" in order to learn about the conditions under which their loved ones had lived and died. They also argued that Auschwitz I had been a model camp (*Musterlager*) and that during the war it had been much more orderly than at present.[25] Indeed, this orderliness had precisely been one of the instruments of terror. Koźniewski's scepticism "relates not only to paths and flower beds, but also to the varnished doors, the freshly painted walls, the impeccable tidiness and the fragrant cleanliness", replied Konstanty Przybysławski, a former Auschwitz inmate. "If he had seen those same walls, window frames and doors when the camp was operational, he might complain to the museum management that previously the blocks were more meticulously maintained, except that in those days you could pay with your life for damaging the French polish […] Signs such as 'Remove Your Hat' may seem innocuous to the author of the reportage, but back then failure to comply would have resulted in severe head injuries at the very least."[26] For Wincenty Hein, another inmate, it was precisely the contrast between the appearance of the main camp on the one hand, and "the dry numbers of victims", "the mass of spectacles, suitcases, etc." on the other, that revealed the true horror of Auschwitz.[27] And in any case this was a simplification, since the items in question did not originate from Auschwitz I but from Birkenau and belonged to Jews who had been exterminated there.

But even the advocates of the PMOB agreed about one thing: that the museum, just as film, art and literature, was not able to recreate the "aura of death" which had permeated the camp. The Auschwitz Museum, wrote Tadeusz Korczak, "does not reveal the horror of the camp, nor do a few barracks in Birkenau. Works of art will likewise fail in this challenge. From the moment the smoke ceased to billow from the crematoria chimneys, nothing would ever be able to represent the horror as it truly was."[28] It was also emphasised that the museum's task was not to recreate the atmosphere of those days but to impart knowledge about Nazi crimes. According to Hein, "the Auschwitz Museum is not meant to be a temple of horror or an exclusively emotional experience. Its essence and purpose is to accumulate documentary evidence and materials relating to the concentration

25 Jacek Lechandro notes that the theory that Auschwitz I had been a "model camp" has no basis in historical documentation. The main camp was only ever visited by one delegation of the International Red Cross. The "orderly" appearance of the camp was due to the fact that it had been created in buildings dating from before the First World War, which had served as military barracks in the inter-war years. Lechandro, *Zburzyć i zaorać*, p. 222.

26 Konstanty Przybysławski, "Jeszcze raz 'drażliwy problem'", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 12 Dec. 1948.

27 Wincenty Hein, "Czym jest Muzeum Oświęcimskie", *Dziennik Polski*, 19 Nov. 1948.

28 Tadeusz Korczak, "Czy zburzyć i zaorać? W odpowiedzi na drażliwy problem", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1-15 Nov. 1948.

camps, with their dry and dispassionate eloquence, emphasised solely by authentic, external accessories. For this reason it is not, and has never been, the intention or the responsibility of the museum management to preserve all the accessories that accompanied 'that life' and 'that horror'. By maintaining, within certain limits, the external framework of the camp in the form of blocks, signs, barbed wire, etc., the intention was not to evoke or to recreate the horror of those times but rather to give an idea of the external appearance of the camp at 'a given time'." There was widespread agreement, however, that the permanent exhibition needed to be supplemented with statistical data, documents, and witness accounts. For, as Konstanty Przybysławski noted, although the remnants of the camp were an important aid to the imagination, they could not replace historical data. The PMOB staff gave assurances that the current exhibition was merely the germ of a future museum. However, the PMOB faced serious financial and staffing problems, and the deadline for completing the work was continually put back.

Similar discussions on the desirability of preserving camp remnants were taking place in regard to Mauthausen in Austria. In this debate, analogous arguments were used. Concerns were raised that the camp buildings had completely lost their original appearance as a result of restoration. Some authors even accused the people and institutions responsible of deliberately erasing the evidence of crimes. As Perz claims, these accusations were in part justified, as the method used to restore the camp remnants did not meet conservation standards.[29] On the other hand, the equally widespread view that concentration camps had always been dirty and unkempt was also mistaken. While SS structures still operated smoothly, writes Perz, Mauthausen resembled a "tightly-run barracks" (*straff geführte Kaserne*), as did other concentration camps. The staff tried to give the camp an idyllic appearance, although the maintenance of order was itself an instrument of terror, a fact noted in the debates which took place in the second half of the 1940s. It was only just before liberation that Nazi camps fell into chaos. "Thus, the outward appearance of a concentration camp […] did not reflect, in any simple fashion, the crimes committed within," writes Perz. "To negate the dissonance between the monstrosity of those crimes and the restored remnants of the camp's physical structure would have amounted to consciously opting for a strategy of complete and utter staging."[30]

In the discussions over Mauthausen, serious doubts were also raised about whether the camp experience could be communicated at all. Thus, for instance, in an article entitled "If the Mauthausen Memorial Could Speak" (*Wenn das Mahnmal Mauthausen sprechen könnte*), published in the spring of 1949 in *Linzer Tagblatt*, the author cites a (no doubt spurious) conversation between a tourist visitor to the camp and a former inmate:

29 Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen*, pp. 114-116.

30 Ibid., p. 117.

> "Please tell me." But the man, a former Mauthausen inmate, shakes his head. "How could I explain it to you? It cannot be described, or shown, even in approximate terms. Over there is a fake sanatorium that the Nazis wanted to show to people who visited the camp. And the reality? Listen, even the sun shone differently back then…."[31]

Just as in Poland, the debates in Austria cannot be completely separated from the political context. Austrian society, admits Perz, was rather reluctant to commemorate Mauthausen, and for this reason some of the statements should be seen as attempts to repudiate the very idea of building a museum. Harold Marcuse recounts a similar debate which took place in the West German press in 1951/1952 over the exhibition in Dachau.[32] In this instance, the people who initiated the debate wished to see the closure of the museum, which was inconvenient for the Bavarians, and succeeded in doing so. Nevertheless, the fact that similar issues were raised simultaneously in various corners of Europe, and on both sides of the Iron Curtain, suggests that these debates cannot merely be put down to political infighting; rather, they should be seen as expressions of the universal problem of how to commemorate "traumatic places". Stalinism brought the whole process to an end. In November 1950, with the opening of a new, purely propagandist exhibition at Auschwitz, the problem of how to communicate the experience of the camps ceased to be a pressing concern for the museum staff.

Cemeteries or "Battlefields"?[33]

In the words of Jonathan Webber, Auschwitz is "not a museum, even though it seems on the surface to be a museum; it is not a cemetery, even though it has some features of a cemetery; it is not just a tourist site, even though it is often full to overflowing with tourists. It is all these things at once."[34] The place thus belongs to the realm of both the sacred and the profane, and the same is true of other Nazi concentration camps and death camps. In the immediate post-war years, therefore, it was natural that the manner in which those places were commemorated, and the ceremonies which took place there, took on a religious character. Indeed, religious symbols were a common aspect of remembrance in the second half of the 1940s. Monuments commemorating mass graves, places of execution or members of a community killed or murdered during the war, were also very often religious in

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31 "Wenn das Mahnmal Mauthausen sprechen könnte", *Linzer Tagblatt* 7 May 1949. Quoted after: Perz, *Die KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen*, p. 115.

32 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, pp. 173-181.

33 Wincenty Hein, "Czym jest Muzeum Oświęcimskie", *Dziennik Polski*, 19 Nov. 1948.

34 Jonathan Webber, "The Future of Auschwitz. Some Personal Reflections", *Religion, State and Society*, 1, 20 (1992), p. 84

nature. Such monuments were erected all over Poland, usually as a result of grassroots initiatives.[35] Almost all the events at Majdanek and Auschwitz, as well as at other former concentration camps and prisons, were accompanied by religious ceremonies. Between 1945 and 1948, a regular feature of "Majdanek Week" was a requiem mass that took place on the site of the former camp.[36] As part of the event, other religious faiths also held services in the nearby city of Lublin.[37] The opening ceremony of the Auschwitz Museum on 14 June 1947 began with Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish prayers said by religious leaders from all four denominations.[38]

Former Nazi camps became places of pilgrimage on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.[39]

From the outset, the Polish authorities not only tolerated but actually encouraged the use of religion to commemorate wartime places of execution. The two institutions principally responsible for remembrance were the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom at the Ministry of Art and Culture and the ROPWiM, the latter having been established in the summer of 1947; the commemoration of Jewish martyrdom was largely left to the CKŻP. The authorities sought to standardise forms of remembrance across Poland. According to Zbigniew Mazur, by using the same designs for plaques and monuments the authorities wanted to emphasise the mass nature of the crimes and the idea of a nation joined in suffering.[40] However, such homogeneity also made it easier to scrutinise grassroots initiatives. Control was stepped up during the summer of 1948. In a circular sent out in July, the PZbWP's Executive Board informed members

35 On this subject, see: Zbigniew Mazur, "Upamiętnienie w latach 1945-1948 ofiar niemieckiej okupacji", *Przegląd Zachodni* 4 (2004), pp. 134-136. Cf. also: Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, pp. 13, 24.

36 Photographs from the commemorative events of "Majdanek Week" 1945-1948, APMM, Fotografie, Kolekcja nr 6 (Wydarzenia w Muzeum 1944-1948), file no.: 6.45.2.7-18, 36, 41, 48; 6.46.7.8,12; 6.47.4.40; 6.48.3.24-25, 27, 34.

37 Information note by the PZbWP for FIAPP, no date (before 20 Sep. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 52; BŻAP 94/342, 22 Sep. 47; Society for the Care of Majdanek to the Provincial KŻ in Lublin, 28 Aug. 1948, AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydz. Kultury i Propagandy 303/XXIII/218.

38 Programme of events for the opening of the Auschwitz Museum 14 Jun. 1947, APMAB, Projekty ramowe, założenia ogólne Muzeum Oświęcimskiego 1946-1947. For a description of the events, see: Stanisławski and Rawicz, "Podniosłe dni Oświęcimia. Otwarcie Muzeum Martyrologii Polskiej", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Jul. 1947; "Świadectwo zbrodni. 14 czerwca 1947 r. w Oświęcimiu" (hs), *Nasze Słowo*, 20 Jun. 1947.

39 Photographs from the celebration of All Saints' Day at Majdanek, 1 Nov. 1944, APMM, Fotografie, Kolekcja nr 6 (Wydarzenia w Muzeum 1944-1948), file no.: 6.44.6.1, 6.44.6.3, 6.44.6.4; PMOB to the PZbWP, 13 Sep. 1946, AAN, PZbWP 52; "Święto zmarłych w obozach koncentracyjnych", *Wolni Ludzie*, 1 Nov. 1947.

40 Mazur, "Upamiętnienie", pp. 152-153.

that pursuant to a new resolution all monuments, exhibitions, publications, and lectures on the subject of "the struggle and martyrdom of the Polish nation" would require the approval of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom and the ROPWiM.[41]

Holy Mass celebrated in the yard of Block 11 in Auschwitz during the official opening of the museum, 14 June 1947 (courtesy of APMAB).

Already in the summer of 1945, the Department had launched a campaign for the temporary commemoration of wartime places of execution.[42] These makeshift memorials were to comprise a wooden cross entwined with a crown of barbed wire made to resemble thorns, as well as a commemorative plaque. The Department sent out letters to provincial offices in which it encouraged the public to erect throughout Poland monuments commemorating the victims of Nazi crimes, ideally in accordance with the enclosed design. As Mazur notes, the design combined both religious and national elements. By supplementing the cross with a crown of thorns, the idea was to emphasise that the victims had died as martyrs,

41 Circular no. 8/48, 9 Jul. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 14.
42 Mazur, "Upamiętnienie", pp. 141-146.

giving their life for their faith and the Fatherland. The message was reinforced by the inscription on the plaque: "This place is sanctified by the blood of Polish martyrs fighting for freedom".[43] The design alluded to the iconography which had been used in contexts such as the Information Bulletin—the official newspaper of the Polish Underground State. It appeared to meet the public's expectations and did not differ much from unofficial commemorative designs, with one caveat: it seems—though this would need to be confirmed by further research—that the memorial crosses which arose through grassroots initiatives were devoid of heroic elements in the form of a crown of thorns or a relevant inscription.

Religious symbolism was used not only by Catholics but also by members of other faiths. I mentioned earlier the Jewish, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox services conducted in Lublin and at Auschwitz. The modest monuments that accompanied the Jewish exhibitions created by the CKŻP in Auschwitz and Majdanek in 1946-1947 also contained many references to Judaism, including a nine-branched candelabrum (*hanukiah*), a Star of David, a flying dove, and running deer.[44] In the case of Jewish culture, however, it is hard to distinguish clearly between religious and national symbolism. The Star of David, in particular, may be seen as a symbol identifying both the faith and the nationality of the victims.[45]

It is worth noting that the sanctification of former concentration camp sites was characteristic not only of Poland but also of other European countries, including Austria and Germany.[46] The most obvious example is Dachau. At the turn of 1945/1946, members of the SS who were interned in Dachau constructed a Catholic church nearby. The project was initiated by Father Leonhard Roth, a former inmate of the camp and chaplain to the interned men.[47] In 1949, the mass graves of Dachau victims located on Leiten hill on the outskirts of the town were commemorated with a cross and a Star of David.[48] Finally, in the years 1960-1967, a Carmelite convent was established in the immediate vicinity of the camp, and within its perimeter Catholic and Protestant chapels as well as a Jewish memo-

43 Ibid., p. 142.

44 See photographs: APMAB, nr neg. 03438; AŻIH, Dział Graficzny, Album „Muzeum żydowskie w Majdanku" 1946, Album 15 nr 38993912 (A/31).

45 During the First Zionist Congress in Basle (1897) the Star of David was accepted as the emblem of the Zionist movement; after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 it was included on the national flag. In the Third Reich and occupied territories the Star of David was the symbol used to stigmatise Jewish victims.

46 On this subject, see: Insa Eschebach, *Öffentliches Gedenken. Deutsche Erinnerungskulturen seit der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 48-56, 108-116.

47 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, fig. 7. The church was demolished in 1964 (ibid., pp. 222-225, figs 2, 42).

48 Ibid., pp. 189-192.

rial building were built[49]; to this day, these constitute the central elements of the landscaped memorial.

As the German scholar Insa Eschebach notes, "in the modern age, sanctification should be seen as typical method of dealing with death caused by violence".[50] Its primary function is to lend transcendental meaning to death, which enables traumatic experiences to be overcome. Sanctification also attempts to restore dignity to the victims—the very dignity denied to them by their torturers. In the immediate post-war years, the purpose of lending a religious character to the sites of former concentration camps was to raise their status and prevent their desecration. As Jerzy Wyszomirski suggested, "in order to protect Majdanek against sensationalism and vulgarity, it must be given more solemnity. [...] I am neither excessively religious nor a practising believer. I am a philosophical Christian, and I think that Majdanek is, in the final analysis, a cemetery. [...] Aside from a museum, a few small shrines could be built—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim shrines—to commemorate the people of those faiths who perished at Majdanek, in many cases, no doubt, with prayer on their lips. Such shrines would perhaps highlight the fraternity of nations […] and strengthen the symbolism of Majdanek. Furthermore, they would add solemnity and majesty, which frankly might otherwise be lost amongst the hustle and bustle of inquisitive tourists."[51] Similar proposals were made in regard to Auschwitz. Jan Paweł Gawlik, for instance, lamented the absence of a chapel within the museum: "The matter having of a place of worship in a cemetery of millions of people is hardly trivial. The followers of at least four religions have the right to say prayers here for the souls of their loved ones."[52]

This ecumenism proved to be largely declarative. Although elements of Jewish iconography could be noticed at the sites of former concentration camps, Christian symbolism, and its associated conceptions of death, was dominant both in Poland and abroad. One of the most flagrant examples of the Catholic majority's disregard of victims of other faiths, particularly Jews, was the cross placed on the ruins of one of the crematoria in Birkenau before the official opening of the museum in June 1947.[53] The cross was also the central element of the first

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49 Ibid., pp. 230-237, 266–271, 282–286, figs 2, 43, 63, 64. When comparing the ways in which different Nazi camps were commemorated, however, it is important to remember that unlike Auschwitz or Majdanek, Dachau was not an extermination camp where the mass murder of Jews was carried out; it was "only" a concentration camp. Moreover, a particularly large group of Catholic, and also Protestant, clergy were interned in Dachau.

50 Eschebach, *Öffentliches Gedenken*, pp. 48-49.

51 Jerzy Wyszomirski, "Majdanek przeobrażony", *Tydzień*, 6 Oct. 1946.

52 J.P. Gawlik, "Uwagi o muzeum zbrodni", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 Sep. 1949.

53 Photograph of the cross in front of the ruins of the crematorium in Birkenau, *Dziennik*

exhibition opened in 1946 in the basement of Block 4 in Auschwitz I; it was set at the end of a colonnade, at the sides of which victims' belongings brought from Birkenau were displayed on low platforms.[54]

Official opening of the State Museum at Auschwitz, 14 June 1947. A ceremony by the remains of one of the crematoria in Birkenau. In front of the ruins a cross with a crown of thorns is visible (courtesy of APMAB).

Klaus-Peter Friedrich is probably right to claim that the purpose of many of these projects was to blur the identity of the victims.[55] Thus, for instance, in a letter to the editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, one reader demanded that a huge church be erected within the Auschwitz site, since, he argued, most of the victims of the camp had

Polski, 4 Apr. 1947. Later documents also mention the cross erected on the ruins of crematorium IV in Birkenau. See: Director of the PMOB, Stefan Wiernik, to the CZM (official copy), 26 Oct. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81; Note regarding the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, no date, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/356.

54 Photograph: APMAB 03441. See also the description of the exhibition: Zofia Rozensztrauch, "Oświęcim po raz drugi... (Od naszego specjalnego wysłannika na pola Oświęcimskie)", *Nasze Słowo*, 18 Mar. 1947.

55 Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "'Die Mehrheit der im Lager zu Tode Gequälten waren Katholiken...' Frühe Bestrebungen für eine 'Katholisierung' des ehemaligen NS-Lagers Auschwitz", *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 54, 2 (2005).

been Catholics: "Published memoirs and the stories of former inmates alike tell us about the religious experiences of those who survived the camp, and the famous crosses scratched onto plaster by people condemned to death are a stark reminder of what religion meant to the prisoners."[56] The spires of the church, according to the reader, would be a symbol of "the victory of good over evil and would express gratitude to God for ending the long night of captivity". It would be simplistic to claim, however, that the Christianisation of places of remembrance was always part of a deliberate attempt to "dejudaize" or even to "polonize" the victims of concentration camps. From the perspective of Polish Catholics—for whom, despite centuries of coexistence, the world of Judaism remained entirely alien—raising a cross seemed to be the most obvious way to commemorate the victims. For many, the cross was not so much a religious symbol as a centuries-old means of honouring the dead. As Zofia Żorecka wrote in a commentary to the aforementioned exhibition in the basement of Block 4 in Auschwitz I, the cross had become "a universal symbol, the most dignified symbol of suffering, regardless of faith."[57]

First exhibition in Auschwitz, probably opened in the summer of 1946 in the basement of Block 4. It is this exhibition that Zofia Rosensztrauch was referring to in her complaint that Jewish liturgical items such as prayer shawls and phylacteries were on display against a background of crosses (courtesy of APMAB).

56 "Lagier oświęcimski" (GTS), *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 13 Jun. 1948.
57 Zofia Żorecka, "Wiedza oświęcimska", *Odra*, 29 Aug. 1948.

In another article, Jan Paweł Gawlik proposed that in order to convey to visitors the sheer number of victims of Auschwitz, four million crosses should be erected within the Birkenau site.[58] In light of this proposal, Gawlik's earlier declaration that Auschwitz should not become "a chauvinistic institution of Polish martyrdom" appears somewhat less than sincere.[59] It is clear from his other proclamations that Gawlik was perfectly aware that the majority of Auschwitz victims were Jews. However, his proposal can also be interpreted in another way: not as a deliberate attempt to blur the identity of the victims but as the most obvious means—in Gawlik's view—of commemorating the dead, irrespective of their faith or nationality. This is also how Eugenia Kocwa interpreted the proposal. She was one of very few to see the idea as problematic, yet she supported it nonetheless:

> It does not matter that many of those who died there did not consider the cross as their emblem. The cross is not just a symbol of a Christian idea—it is an emblem of suffering. Those who died a martyr's death are deserving of the cross. [...] Let us look upon them as people who were denied the right to life by an inhuman ideology, and let us celebrate their memory in the manner that centuries-old tradition teaches us to commemorate the dead.[60]

Putting up crosses in a place of execution, Kocwa continued, "would not be at all artificial. It would be a long-accepted means of honouring the departed; it would give their anonymous and debased death the dignity it was denied by people who had only contempt for other human beings and human life."

The Christianisation of former concentration camps and death camps testified, if not to the deliberate blurring of the victims' identity, then at least to a total lack of sensitivity to the feelings of other groups of victims. For Jews who survived the Holocaust, this was an extremely bitter pill to swallow, as is evidenced by Zofia Rozensztrauch's report on her visit to the Auschwitz Museum in January 1947, which was sent to the Presidium of the CKŻP. Neither in Auschwitz I, nor in Birkenau, she complained bitterly, "was there a single word, a single plaque, about the suffering and death of millions of Jews".[61] Yet scattered around the entire camp were crosses entwined with thorns, obscuring, in the background, Jewish liturgical items such as prayer shawls (*tallitot*) and phylacteries (*tefillin*).

The discussion in *Tygodnik Powszechny* was divorced from political reality, and Gawlik's proposal, leaving aside the cost and potential technical problems, had not the slightest chance of being implemented. Indeed, religious forms of

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58 "Bez ogródek. Projekt" (gaw.), *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 9 Oct. 1949.

59 J.P. Gawlik, "Uwagi o muzeum zbrodni", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 25 Sep. 1949.

60 Eugenia Kocwa, "Oświęcimskie krzyże", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 Mar. 1950.

61 Report by Zofia Rozensztrauch from her official visit to the site of the former camp at Auschwitz, 7 Jan. 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP, Tow. Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, Korespondencja krajowa 1947 r. 61.

remembrance were gradually abandoned in Poland from 1948 onwards.[62] The reasons for this new course were, first, the growing conflict between Church and State and the efforts of the authorities to secularise Polish society and, second, the general change in the PPR/PZPR's "historical policy", which I discussed earlier.

The religious monuments which appeared in the first years after the war, although they sometimes included heroic elements, primarily expressed a sense of loss and mourning for the victims; if they offered any comfort, it was only in the transcendental realm. This stood in contradiction to the slogan of "the struggle against victimhood", which first emerged in 1948. Furthermore, the sanctification of sites of memory led to the exclusion of leftist and communist activists from the Polish national pantheon at a time when the Stalinist authorities were trying to rebrand them as the leading force of the anti-fascist resistance movement. An instruction from the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party (KC PPR) to the PZbWP's Executive Board read: "Self-pitying grief without a sense of victory would consolidate the dark vision of national humiliation; it would, in fact, sustain the poisoned moral fruit of the Nazi invasion and occupation. Monuments raised on the graves of the victims of Nazism should depict the oppressor's ultimate defeat, the struggle for freedom and democracy, and the liberation and victory of the nation."[63] For the KC PPR, "victimhood" and "religiosity" were synonymous. Characteristic in this regard were the words of a delegate to the PZbWP's national congress in the summer of 1949. As a result of the purges carried out amongst the authorities of the Wrocław Branch in 1948, stated the delegate, it had been possible to eliminate "victimhood and a deep-rooted religious spirit" from the ranks of the organisation.[64] For the sake of clarity, it should be added that until 1948 the chairman of the PZbWP's Wrocław Branch had been a Catholic priest.

Beginning in 1949, ceremonies at former concentration camp sites were no longer accompanied by prayer and religious services. Proposals to commemorate the victims of Birkenau that arose in the 1950-1955 period, which I discussed in the previous chapter, were also secular in character. A sketch of a provisional monument made in the autumn of 1950 by Henryk Matysiak shows a black obelisk, meant to symbolise a crematorium chimney, standing on a wide platform. A stone path lined with candles on either side leads up to the obelisk. The monument was to bear the following inscription: "In memory of the four million people from all countries of Europe who were martyred here at the hands of their Nazi

62 This is also mentioned by: Mazur, "Upamiętnienie", p. 156.

63 Official letter from the Department of Propaganda and the Press at the KC PPR to the ZG PZbWP, 12 Feb. 1948, AAN, PZbWP 40.

64 Shorthand minutes of the national session of the PZbWP, Warsaw 30-31 Jul. 1949, AAN, PZbWP 2.

oppressors, 1940-45".[65] The monument in the form of an urn that was unveiled in Birkenau in 1955 between the ruins of the crematoria was also devoid of all religious connotations.[66]

The struggle against "religiosity" was waged throughout the entire Stalinist period. In the autumn of 1953, the new director of the PMOB, Stefan Wiernik, denounced one of his employees to the Central Museum Administration with the following words:

> The museum management has established that Citizen Targosz is creating an atmosphere of feverish preparation for 1 November [All Saints Day] as a day of religious worship. Among other things, he has tried to convince the management that it is necessary to renovate, before 1 November, the crosses in Birkenau next to the pyres and near to Crematorium No. IV, which (he believes) are in an unsatisfactory condition. The clerical atmosphere whipped up by Citizen Targosz is infecting the staff and even spreading to less informed members of the Party.[67]

The aim of the authorities was to eliminate not only Catholic symbolism but all religious connotations per se. In the autumn of 1949, a monument to Jewish martyrs was unveiled in the Jewish cemetery in Płock. At the next meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, Salo Fiszgrund, who had been present at the unveiling ceremony, stated that although the monument was very handsome and impressive it was inappropriate on account of its religious character, which was due to the fact that its construction had begun three years previously.[68] An Auschwitz exhibition scenario dating from the first half of 1950 recommended that, in the section relating to the extermination of Jews, "commemoration in a secular, and not a confessional Zionist form" should be used, since "the emphasis should be on the race, and not on the religion" of the victims.[69]

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65 Designs for provisional memorials in honour of the Soviet Army (at the entrance to Auschwitz) and in memory of the victims of the camp (at Birkenau) sent in by H. Matysiak to the Dept of Propaganda at the KC PZPR, 26 Oct. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

66 Photograph: APMAB, 16053.

67 Director of the PMOB, Stefan Wiernik, to the CZM (official copy), 26 Oct. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

68 Minutes of a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 24 Oct. 1949, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/18. On the subject of the monument in Płock, its history, and its form, see: Ryszard Bielawski, "Po nich ja płaczę", *Słowo Żydowskie* 5-6, 17-31 Mar. 2005, p. 16.

69 Scenario of the exhibition at the PMOB—Block 4, "Zagłada milionów" (The Extermination of Millions), no date (probably 1950), AAN, MKiS, Gabinet Ministra 110.

"Jewish Cemeteries" or "Places of Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and of Other Nations"?

As I tried to show in Chapter Two, the subject of the Holocaust was present in Polish public debate in the years 1944-1948/1949. Jewish martyrdom was mentioned not only in the media and in academic texts, in fiction and in memoirs, but also found expression in material forms of remembrance. Local Jewish communities and the CKŻP funded monuments and plaques commemorating the victims of Nazi genocide in many parts of Poland. Most well-known is the Warsaw Ghetto Monument by Natan Rapaport and Leon Suzin, which stands to this day[70]; it was unveiled on 19 April 1948 to mark the fifth anniversary of the start of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Most monuments, however, were far less ambitious. They were usually raised in Jewish cemeteries or, where none existed, in cemeteries of other faiths. In Warsaw itself, prior to the creation of Rapaport and Suzin's monument, several smaller memorials were built. In April 1946, on a square by Zamenhof Street where one of the first armed clashes of the 1943 uprising had taken place, a modest monument in the form of a plaque surrounded by red sandstone was unveiled; the inscription, in Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish, read: "To those who fell in the unprecedented and heroic struggle for the dignity and freedom for the Jewish nation, for a free Poland, and for the liberation of man—The Polish Jews".[71] A month later, a monument to the fallen Poale Zion [Workers of Zion] activists appeared in the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street.[72] In the same year, a plaque was affixed to a section of the wall that had surrounded the *Umschlagplatz*[73] during the war; it commemorated the "hundreds of thousands of Jews" sent from the *Umschlagplatz* "to the extermination camps".[74] And in the summer of 1946, a monument to the Unknown Jew was raised in a Protestant cemetery in the Pomeranian town of Wyganowo.[75] I mentioned earlier the Jewish monument unveiled in the spring of 1948 by the ruins of one of the crematoria in Birkenau, as well as the monument to Jewish martyrs erected in the Jewish cemetery in Płock in the autumn of 1949.[76] Similar monuments appeared in many other places across Poland.

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70 On the subject of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument see, inter alia: Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, pp. 41, 252; Natan Rapoport, "Memoir of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument" in *The Art of Memory*; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memories and Meanings*, Yale 1993, pp. 155-184.

71 Konstanty Gebert, "The Dialectics of Memory in Poland. Holocaust Memorials in Warsaw" in *The Art of Memory*, pp. 122-123.

72 Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, p. 38.

73 Umschlagplatz (reloading point)—the point from which the Nazis deported Jews to Treblinka during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto.

74 Gebert, *The Dialectics of Memory*, p. 123.

75 BŻAP 95/205, 26 Aug. 1946.

76 BŻAP 81/561, 25 Oct. 1949; Minutes of a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 24 Oct. 1949, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/18. See also: Bielawski, "Po nich ja płaczę", p. 16.

Aside from monuments, several historical exhibitions dedicated to the fate of the Jews during the Second World War were created. In September 1946, the "Jewish pavilion", arranged by the CKŻP and CŻKH, was opened to the public in Majdanek. In June of the following year, during the official inauguration of the Auschwitz Museum, a display devoted to the Holocaust, again prepared by the CKŻP, was opened in one of the blocks in Auschwitz I. And in April 1948, on the fifth anniversary of the start of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a Museum of Jewish Martyrdom and Struggle was opened in the Jewish Historical Institute on Tłomackie Street.[77] Besides national or even international exhibitions organised in cooperation with the CKŻP, small local exhibitions were also established. Thus, for instance, in the spring of 1948, an exhibition entitled "German Crimes" opened in Radom, which included a room dedicated to the fate of the city's Jews.[78] According to a description given in the local newspaper, *Życie Radomskie*, against the wall stood "a ruined altar with a shattered panel, broken candleholders, and a discarded *tallit* (prayer shawl) whose dirty whiteness is stained with blood. Terrifying exhibits fill the display case: a handful of human ashes from the crematorium and a bar of soap made from human fat. On the table lies a photograph album, the contents of which make one's hair stand on end."[79] The display was arranged by a member of the Radom Jewish Committee.

The above examples show that in the initial post-war years it was possible to commemorate Jewish martyrdom in Poland. However, the form and status of such commemoration was the subject of disputes and negotiation between, on the one hand, representatives of the Jewish community and, on the other, the central and local authorities, the PZbWP, and other interested parties. The history of the Jewish exhibitions at Majdanek and Auschwitz shows that much depended on local decision-makers and their relationship with the CKŻP.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, as part of "Majdanek Week" in September 1946, barracks were ceremonially handed over to delegates from 22 nations and countries whose citizens had perished in the camp, including Jews, who were represented by the CKŻP.[80]

Many Jews from Poland and abroad took part in the ceremony. Marek (Mejlach) Bitter, a former Majdanek inmate and CKŻP member, paid tribute to the

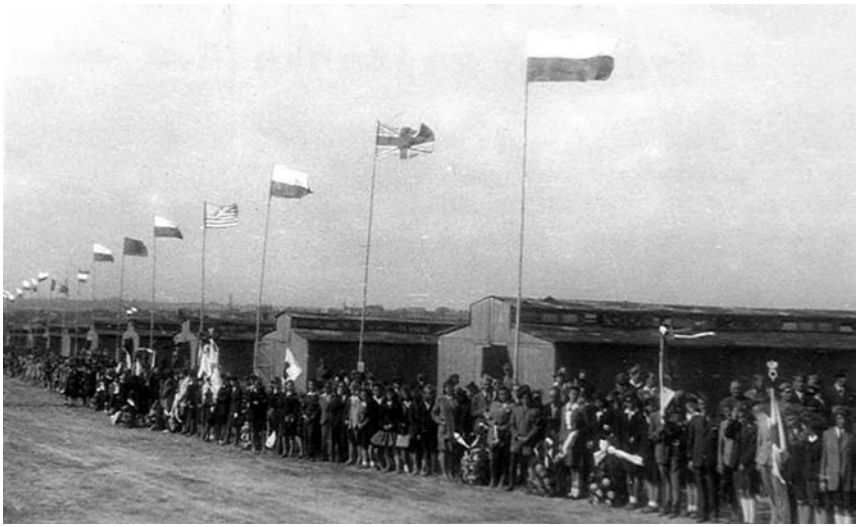
77 BŻAP 35/411, 20 Apr. 1948.

78 "Setki osób przybyło na otwarcie wystawy 'Zbrodnie niemieckie'" (Iw.), *Życie Radomskie*, 24 May 1948; BŻAP 47/422, 3 Jun. 1948.

79 Iwona Gousse, "Wystawa 'Zbrodnie niemieckie'", *Życie Radomskie*, 27 May 1948.

80 Director of the PMM, Stanisław Brodziak, to the Lublin Military Region Command regarding the preparations for the commemorative events of "Majdanek Week" (3 Sep. 1946) in *Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944-1947*, p. 183. Photographs: Symbolic handover of the barracks to the nations in Field IV, APMM, Fotografie, Kolekcja nr 6 (Wydarzenia w Muzeum 1944-1948), file no.: 6.46.7.10-11.

hundreds of thousands of Jews murdered in Majdanek and the "millions of Jews who had died on the front line of the fight against fascism and in Nazi death camps".[81] Next, the Minister of Justice and chairman of the PZbWP's Supreme Council, Henryk Świątkowski, handed Bitter the keys to the building with the words: "Accept this barrack as proof of our deepest sympathy for the Jewish people, who suffered more than any", after which the historical exhibition prepared by the CKŻP in cooperation with the CŻKH was officially opened.[82]



Symbolic handover of barracks to countries whose citizens perished at Majdanek, September 1946 (courtesy of APMM)

One of the initiators of the project was Zofia Rozensztrauch, mentioned earlier. The exhibition was at once very modest and traditional in character; its main purpose was to honour the memory of the victims. Although it contained certain heroic aspects, it primarily expressed a sense of grief and loss. The central element of the exhibition was a symbolic tombstone.[83] The figure of a weeping woman resting against the tombstone, flanked by burning candles, captured a sense of sorrow and reverence for the victims

81 BŻAP 106/216, 20 Sep. 1946.

82 Ibid.

83 Album "Muzeum Żydowskie w Majdanku", 1946, AŻIH, Dział Graficzny, Album 15 nr 38993912 (A/31). Cf. also: Description of the Jewish pavilion at Majdanek drawn up by the Provincial KŻ in Lublin, 17 Sep. 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydz. Kultury i Propagandy 303/XXIII/218.

of genocide. The nine-branched candelabrum (*hanukiah*) atop the tombstone not only confirmed the identity of the victims but could also be interpreted as a sign of hope and trust in God. The Hebrew inscription on the tombstone read: "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15).[84] In the background, on a drape of black fabric, was a Star of David and an inscription in Polish: "In memory of the hundreds of thousands of Jews murdered at Majdanek by Nazi thugs". The monument was reached along a colonnade formed of the posts supporting the roof of the barrack. Up above were hung banners which proclaimed in Polish, French, Yiddish and Hebrew: "The extermination of Jews on Polish soil". Placed along the sides of the barrack were display cases and charts which briefly illustrated, with the aid of a few exhibits, documents, photographs, drawings and statistics, the successive stages of the Holocaust, beginning with the creation of the ghettos and ending with mass extermination. One corner of the barrack was dedicated to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; its central element was a portrait of the leader of the Uprising, Mordechaj Anielewicz. This was the only national exhibition at Majdanek; the plans for further national exhibitions were never realised.

Monument to the Jewish victims of Majdanek. Jewish exhibition at Majdanek designed by Zofia Rozensztrauch, Mojżesz Lubliański and Dawid Opoczyński, opened in September 1946 in one of the barracks (courtesy of AŻIH).

84 I am grateful to Monika Polit for her help in identifying and translating the quotation.

Interior view of the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek, 1946 (courtesy of AŻIH).

Interior view of the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek, 1946 (courtesy of AŻIH).

The part of the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek dedicated to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and its leader Mordechaj Anielewicz, 1946 (courtesy of AŻIH)

It would seem that no major conflicts occurred over the creation of the "Jewish pavilion". Although the project was probably initiated by the CKŻP, it was endorsed by the management of the PMM. Nevertheless, the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek was always meant to be temporary in nature. At the end of the year there were plans to move it to a freshly renovated barrack, where a new and much larger exhibition would be created. In a letter sent in November 1946 to the CKŻP's Department of Culture and Propaganda, the Lublin Jewish Committee gave assurances that the new exhibition would faithfully reflect "the martyrdom of the Jewish nation and its heroic conduct during the years of occupation".[85] Yet the plan was never implemented. We do not know the exact reasons why work on the new exhibition ceased. It would seem, however, that the obstacle was the Jewish Committee rather than the management of the PMM. As the public's interest shifted from Majdanek to Auschwitz, so the CKŻP's priorities changed, too. In 1947, the committee was entirely focused on the creation of the Jewish exhibition at Auschwitz and on the construction of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument in the capital. The committee did not rekindle its interest in the "Jewish pavilion" at

85 Official letter from the Provincial KŻ, Dept of Culture and Propaganda, to the CKŻP, Dept of Culture and Propaganda, 27 Nov. 1946, AŻIH, CKŻP, Wydz. Kultury i Propagandy 303/XXIII/218.

Majdanek until the spring of 1948, during preparations to mark the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; even then, however, no major changes were made, probably due to lack of funds.[86] We do not know exactly when the "Jewish pavilion" at Majdanek was finally closed, but it must have been prior to the opening of the new exhibition at the PMM in 1954.

The history of the Jewish exhibition at Auschwitz was rather different. Unlike Majdanek, Auschwitz was managed by Polish political prisoners and not by externally appointed officials. From the outset, no representatives of Poland's Jewish community were involved in the creation of the museum. Members of the CKŻP who visited Auschwitz reported that the PMOB staff were failing to commemorate Jewish victims of the camp. The chairman of the Jewish Committee in Zawiercie, who visited the museum in the autumn of 1946, was shocked that "the guide, when describing the Nazi atrocities that took place in the camp, only talks about the suffering of Poles. When it comes us, all he mentions is the Giant Jew[87] [...] and the fact that the *Sonderkommando* was composed of Jews. Neither the guide nor the inscriptions say anything at all about Jews or their suffering in Auschwitz."[88]

In response to an intervention by the CKŻP, the director of the PMOB, Tadeusz Wąsowicz, explained that the museum was a work in progress and that the issue of how to present the suffering of various social and national groups had yet to be decided. He gave assurances that the CŻKH would be involved in this decision. For now, the management could not take responsibility for its guards and guides, who were still being trained and whose views were solely their own.[89] But the CKŻP did not give up. In a letter sent in December 1946 to the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland, the committee members expressed their disbelief that the Auschwitz guides were completely beyond the control of the museum management. They demanded that Wąsowicz instruct his staff on how to talk about the Holocaust.[90]

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86 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 24 Mar. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

87 This was the camp inmate mentioned by Jan Sehn in the GKBZNwP study: "In the winter of 1942/1943, a giant Jew terrorised Block 11 and the penal company; his specific task was to kill people. He did not work, he was well fed and well clothed, and he stood in the place where the inmates worked, leaning on a long, thick bar, and shouting incessantly: 'Bewegung'. If he took a dislike to one of the prisoners, he would call him over and, striking him with the bar on the back of the neck, kill him" ("Obóz zagłady w Oświęcimiu", *Biuletyn GKBZNwP*, Vol. 1 (1946), p. 98).

88 Provincial Jewish Historical Commission (ŻKH) in Katowice to the CŻKH, 22 Oct. 1946, AŻIH, CŻKH, Oddz. w Katowicach 349.

89 Director of the PMOB, Tadeusz Wąsowicz, to the GKBZNwP, 15 Nov. 1946, AŻIH, CŻKH, Oddz. w Katowicach 430.

90 M. Bitter and J. Łazebnika to the GKBZNwP, 12 Dec. 1946, AŻIH, CŻKH 106.

Barely a month later, Zofia Rozensztrauch—the creator of the Jewish exhibition at Majdanek and an employee of the CKŻP's Department of Culture and Propaganda—visited Auschwitz. In a report addressed to the committee's presidium, she complained that:

> Neither in Auschwitz nor in Birkenau will you find a single word, a single plaque, about the suffering and death of millions of Jews. This distressing issue, which affects the entire Jewish community without exception, must be resolved by the Central Committee."[91]

The museum management did indeed seem largely uninterested in commemorating Jewish victims of the camp. Although in the initial exhibition scenario, Wąsowicz and his co-workers—probably as a result of pressure from the CKŻP—noted that the issue of the Holocaust required "special treatment", no details were mentioned.[92] The PMOB's proposal from the spring of 1947 stated that the purpose of the general exhibition would be to "illustrate the prisoners' plight, regardless of their nationality, race or country". Nevertheless, it would be necessary to discuss "the most important issue in the Auschwitz camp, namely, the Jewish question".[93] In the same document, however, the authors stated that the museum should not "give the impression that Auschwitz was exclusively a Jewish place of execution".

In May 1947, a delegation headed by the director of the CŻKH, Nachman Blumental, visited Auschwitz and Katowice. The delegation established that the PMOB director, Tadeusz Wąsowicz, had already developed a plan for the museum that did not envisage a separate Jewish exhibition.[94] The display was to be organised thematically, which meant that exhibits relating to the martyrdom of Jews would be spread across all the rooms. At a meeting convened on the occasion of Blumental's visit to the Katowice Jewish Committee, it was decided that action should be taken to establish in Auschwitz "a separate Jewish pavilion on a par with other national exhibitions".[95] It was also decided that Jewish advisers should

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91 Zofia Rozensztrauch to the CKŻP Presidium, 7 Jan. 1947, AŻIH, Żydowskie Tow. Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, korespondencja krajowa 1947 r. 61.

92 Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp in Oświęcim, no date (before 14 Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13. Cf. also: "Oświęcim w krwi i walce", *Wolni Ludzie*, 15 Jun. 1947.

93 Planning principles of the museum in Oświęcim—official copy, no date (probably before 14 Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13.

94 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 19 May 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a.

95 Minutes of the meeting of the committee tasked with organising an exhibition on the martyrdom of the Jews in Auschwitz, Katowice 14 May 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP, Tow. Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, korespondencja krajowa 01.-10.1947 61.

play a role in determining the profile of the general exhibition. In the words of the chairman of the Katowice Jewish Committee, "further non-participation of Jews in the Auschwitz Museum will cause outrage throughout the Jewish world". The resolutions adopted by the Katowice Jewish Committee were approved by the Presidium of the CKŻP. After hearing the delegation's report, Adolf Berman stated that it was essential that a Jewish pavilion be created at the PMOB, just as in Majdanek. He therefore proposed that the committee members should revisit Auschwitz to review the plans for the exhibition and "force through" their own position. It was also decided that CKŻP representatives would meet with the Minister of Culture, Stefan Dybowski. They were to "categorically demand the establishment of a Jewish pavilion in Auschwitz". Adolf Berman was to intervene with Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz on the matter.[96] Meanwhile, the official opening of the museum was barely a month away. For this reason, it was decided to focus on organising a temporary display that would form part of the general exhibition.

The CKŻP at least managed to score a partial success. At the end of May 1947, a conference took place in Auschwitz attended by representatives of the CKŻP, CŻKH, the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, and the management of the PMOB. Also present at the conference were Nachman Blumental, Ludwik Rajewski, and the director of the museum, Tadeusz Wąsowicz, among others.[97] It was agreed that in future two blocks within Auschwitz I would be placed at the disposal of the CKŻP. In the meantime, the committee was to set up one of the rooms in Block 4 by mid-June; the work was entrusted to Jewish artists from *Sztuka* [Art], a local cooperative.

The Jewish exhibition opened on 14 June 1947 as part of the official inauguration of the Auschwitz Museum; its central element was a symbolic monument-cum-sarcophagus[98], opposite which stood an urn containing the ashes of victims. Hung on a side wall was a map showing the numbers of Jews deported to Auschwitz from various countries of Europe.

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96 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 24 May 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a; Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 6 Jun. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a.

97 CŻKH (Kermisz, Blumental) to the CKŻP, 30 May 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 109; Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 10 Jun. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a; CŻKH (Kermisz, Blumental) to the CKŻP, 30 May 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 109; "Muzeum Martyrologii Polskiej. Ogólnopolski Zlot b. więźniów w Oświęcimiu", *Dziennik Zachodni*, 31 May 1947; "Muzeum w Oświęcimiu", *Opinia*, 16 Jun. 1947.

98 For a description of the exhibition, see: BŻAP 57/305, 17 Jun. 1947; BŻAP 60/308, 27 Jun. 1947; Józef Kermisz, "Na największym cmentarzysku narodu żydowskiego", *Opinia*, 12 Aug. 1947.

Monument-cum-sarcophagus. Jewish exhibition at Auschwitz opened on 14 June 1947 (courtesy of APMAB).

The exhibition also included photographs, documents, and sketches depicting Nazi crimes. Organised Jewish resistance in Auschwitz was also mentioned.

The Jewish press was generally positive about the Auschwitz exhibition. In his review, the correspondent of *Nasze Słowo* wrote: "On its opening day, the Jewish pavilion was visited by the public in great numbers. Observing those visitors, I could not help but feel, as I did at the Museum of Jewish Martyrdom in Majdanek, that a great many of the people viewing the exhibits and documents had hitherto been completely unaware of the catastrophic fortunes of the Jewish nation and the boundless suffering that Jews experienced during the occupation, both within this camp and beyond it. Therein lies the justification for having separate Jewish pavilions. For not only do they express our deep sorrow at the loss of one third of our nation, not only do they illustrate the fact that the Jewish nation holds tragic primacy amongst the victims of Nazism—they also fulfil an important educational purpose."[99] It was widely assumed that the exhibition which opened in the summer of 1947 was merely the germ of a much larger "museum of Jew-

99 "Świadectwo zbrodni (14 czerwca 1947 r. w Oświęcimiu)", hs, *Nasze Słowo*, 20 Jun. 1947.

ish martyrdom" to be established at some point in the future. A few weeks after the official opening of the Auschwitz Museum, Nachman Blumental and Józef Kermisz sent a memo to the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, Ludwik Rajewski, in which they presented the CŻKH's plans for the further expansion of the Jewish exhibition. They felt that the exhibition should be transformed into a "lasting monument to the martyrdom of the Jewish nation"[100]:

> An approach based on accurate documentation is the way forward for the Jewish pavilion; statistical documents, charts, numerous exhibits, maps, etc., in all their grim authenticity, are the best means of illustrating the horrors of the camp experience to visitors. We believe that the Jewish pavilion or, rather, Jewish pavilions in Auschwitz should also include exhibits from other death camps, primarily Treblinka, Chełmno, Sobibór and Bełżec, as well as from concentration camps, which, as we all know, were for Jews nothing less than places of extermination. [...] We plan to expand and supplement the pavilion with some of the many exhibits in our possession. We have in mind here, in particular, lists of Jews transported to Auschwitz […] as well as photographs of "deportations" from towns and villages to Auschwitz and other death camps. Since more than a million foreign Jews perished in Auschwitz, we also plan to contact Jewish communities in Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, and France, to ask them to send us materials concerning the "deportations".

Despite the earlier promises of the museum management and the Ministry of Art and Culture to hand over two blocks in Auschwitz I to the CKŻP, the process came to a standstill. At the turn of 1947/1948, CKŻP delegates were sent to Auschwitz to find out how work on the permanent exhibition was progressing. They were given a frosty reception.[101] They also noticed that on a plaque listing the nationalities of the victims of the camp, Jews were conspicuously absent. Perturbed by these facts, Adolf Berman visited the Auschwitz Museum a few weeks later, and the impression he got was similarly negative. Berman stated that although the exhibition had an international character, only one room was devoted to Jewish martyrdom.[102] In other parts of the museum there was no mention of the Jews at all, despite the fact that prayer shawls (*tallitot*) and other Jewish liturgical items were on display. Berman came to the conclusion, therefore, that it was essential to create a separate Jewish block. As the commemoration of Jewish victims of Auschwitz was being derailed by Ludwik Rajewski—a fact which came to light at the next meeting of the CKŻP Presidium—it was decided to intervene directly with Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz, the chairman of the ROPWiM, Zygmunt Balicki, and with the Minister of Art and Culture.

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100 Memorandum of the CŻKH sent to the Dept for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, 14 Jul. 1947, AŻIH, CŻKH 109.

101 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 5 Jan. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

102 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 26 Feb. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

A few days later, a CKŻP delegation was received by Balicki and presented him with its demands concerning the organisation of a Jewish block at Auschwitz. Balicki responded favourably to the demands.[103] In March 1948, a meeting of the ROPWiM took place, attended by, among others, the Minister of Art and Culture; the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, Ludwik Rajewski; the director of the PMOB, Tadeusz Wąsowicz; and Salo Fiszgrund from the CKŻP.[104] During the discussion, Fiszgrund once again requested that two blocks in Auschwitz be handed over to the Jewish community. In response, Wąsowicz stated that the appropriate decisions had already been taken; this, too, proved to be an empty promise.The efforts to commemorate the Jewish victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau were not entirely fruitless, however. As mentioned earlier, in the spring of 1948 the CKŻP obtained the consent of the ROPWiM to create a modest monument within Birkenau in honour of the Polish and European Jews who had perished there; it was to mark the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In the autumn of 1948, the ROPWiM appointed a special Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission[105], comprising Jan Sehn as the representative of the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland; the director of the PMOB; and several former Auschwitz inmates, including Kazimierz Smoleń and Tadeusz Hołuj. Dorota Agatstein-Dormont from the Jewish Historical Institute was also invited to participate.[106] The commission's task was to complete the work on organising the museum. The decision was taken to change the layout of the section entitled "The Extermination of Millions" (Block 4), part of which was devoted to the Jews. As early as in November 1948, Nachman Blumental entrusted the design of the new Jewish room to the PMOB management working in tandem with the Historical Commission. After the design had been approved, the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) undertook to cover the cost of its implementation. The institute was also to supply materials for the exhibition and was consulted over its design.[107]

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103 BŻAP 23/399, 3 Mar. 1948.

104 Minutes of the meeting of the ROPWiM, 23-24 Mar. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 1A.

105 Minutes of a meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 7 Dec. 1948, APMAB, Materiały, t. 56 (Protokoły z posiedzeń Komisji Historycznej Muzeum w Oświęcimiu 1948-1949).

106 Repository of Records of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim (SkAPMAB), korespondencja 4.12.1948-19.12.1949: Jan Sehn to the director of the ŻIH, Nachman Blumental, 4 Dec. 1948; Nachman Blumental to Jan Sehn, 13 Dec. 1948.

107 Minutes of a conference of the Expert Committee of the ROPWiM, Oświęcim 19-21 Nov. 1948, APMM AZ I/14; Minutes of a meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 31 Jan. 1949, APMAB, materiały, t. 56 (Protokoły posiedzeń Komisji Historycznej Muzeum Oświęcimskiego 1948-1949).

In accordance with the plan developed in the years 1948-1950, the exhibition in Block 4 was largely structured to reflect the nationalities of the victims.[108] Although the existing Jewish room was dismantled, in the first half of 1950 a new exhibition devoted to Jewish martyrdom arose in its place. While it had often been stressed previously that the museum should not leave visitors with the impression that "the camp was only populated by Gypsies and Jews"[109] or that "only the Jews suffered mass extermination"[110], photographs from the period show that, despite its brevity, the exhibition did give an idea of the scale of the genocide perpetrated on European Jews. The exhibition illustrated the successive stages of the Holocaust, beginning with the creation of the ghettos and ending with deportation to the death camps. The focus was not only on the fate of Polish Jews but on Jews from all over Europe. Hung on one of the walls was a map of the continent showing the countries from which Jews had been deported to Auschwitz. The maps and charts were supplemented with photographs, exhibits, and documents. Next to the Jewish room, a Polish room was also created. Other parts of the exhibition were dedicated to the fate of the Roma and Soviet prisoners of war.

That the interventions of the CKŻP made the museum staff and members of the Historical Commission more sensitive to the issues surrounding Holocaust remembrance is also shown by the discussion which took place at a meeting of the CKŻP in October 1949. During the deliberations on how to organise the "Block of Death" (Block 11), one of the museum employees pointed out that the proposed design was "dangerous" as it only mentioned Poles. "That's because Poles perished there. No one is going to deny historical fact," retorted Tadeusz Hołuj.[111] He was supported by Jan Sehn: "If you are commemorating a dying person, it is not dangerous. The Jews will be treated in exactly the same way. They will all be commemorated at the mausoleum in Birkenau. The approach here is thematic, so Block 11 will focus on the Polish cause." Of the same opinion was Kazimi-

108 The form of the exhibition may be recreated on the basis of: Minutes of a conference of the ROPWiM, the Expert Committee, and representatives of the MKiS, the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, and the directorate of the PMOB, Oświęcim 2-3 Apr. 1949, APMM, AZ I/14; Scenario for the exhibition in Block 4, "Zagłada milionów", PMOB, no date (on the file 1950), AAN, MKiS, Gabinet Ministra 110; APMAB, Fotografie, Wystawa sprzed 1955 r.

109 Minutes of a meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 31 Jan. 1949, APMAB, Materiały t. 56 (Protokoły posiedzeń Komisji Historycznej Muzeum Oświęcimskiego).

110 Official letter, signature illegible, 14 Nov. 1949, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

111 Minutes of a meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 10 Oct. 1949, APMAB, Materiały, Vol. 56 (Minutes of meetings of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 1948-1949).

erz Smoleń: "In Block 11 there will be one room entirely dedicated to the Poles, in other words, the *Standgericht* (Special Tribunal). Of the people who perished there, 95 per cent, if not all of them, were Poles."

Interior view of the Jewish exhibition at Auschwitz probably opened in the spring of 1950 (courtesy of APMAB).

In August 1950, the Central Committee of the PZPR decided to make fundamental changes to the proposed exhibition scenario for the Auschwitz Museum. At the request of the Central Committee, the Minister of Culture appointed a special commission whose task was to ensure that the institution had an appropriate ideological framework. At its first session, the commission reviewed the exhibition entitled "The Extermination of Millions". It was decided, among others, that the rooms on the ground floor of Block 4 should be redesigned in compliance with the following principles:

– national issues, and in particular Jewish issues, should not be treated separately,
– the impression should not be given that Auschwitz was a place where almost exclusively Jews were exterminated—on the contrary, it must be shown that the enemy of the Jews was also the enemy of the Poles and others.[112]

112 Minutes from a conference of the commission appointed by the MKiS at the request of the KC PZPR to establish the programme of the Auschwitz Museum, 20 Aug. 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD 2/271.

The pressure under which Poland's Jewish community found itself as a result of the Auschwitz exhibition is evidenced by a letter sent in October 1950 by Salo Fiszgrund and the director of the Jewish Historical Institute, Bernard (Berl) Mark, to the Department of Propaganda at the Central Committee of the PZPR. Having conducted an inspection of the Auschwitz Museum—wrote the authors—the delegation, which comprised representatives of the CKŻP and ŻIH, reached the conclusion that "the Jewish room cannot continue in its current form", since it meets "neither the most elementary research guidelines of the Jewish Historical Institute nor the basic requirements of the current political situation":

> The most important shortcomings include the total absence of materials on the resistance movement amongst Jewish prisoners and on the international solidarity shown by Polish, French and Soviet prisoners, and by Austrian and German anti-fascists, towards Jews in the camp. […] The room does not explain the reasons for the extermination of Jews by German fascism and offers no materials on the imperialist context of the Holocaust. It also fails to show that the extermination of Jews was the first stage in the biological eradication of other subjugated nations, above all the Slavic nations. And, most importantly, there is nothing on the emancipatory role of the Soviet Army, which rescued the last survivors of the Nazi terror.[113]

Whilst they were in favour of redeveloping the museum, the authors stressed that—as in the case of other nations—it would be necessary to have a separate Jewish exhibition alongside the main exhibition. They also expressed their willingness to prepare a new design for such an exhibition, which, in general terms, would adhere to the following format:

a) Imperialism and imperialist war as the main reason for the extermination of nations,
b) The Holocaust as the first stage in the Nazi policy of eradicating entire nations,
c) The passive attitude of the Anglo-Saxon nations towards the extermination of European Jews,
d) The martyrdom of the Jews,
e) The Jewish resistance movement (the uprisings in the Warsaw and Białystok ghettos, the revolts in Treblinka and Sobibór, a profile of the heroic Jewess Mala Cymetbaum, who died at Auschwitz, etc.),
f) The solidarity shown by Poles towards Jews (the People's Guard, Auschwitz resistance groups, etc.),
g) The help given to Jews by French anti-fascist inmates of Auschwitz,
h) The help given by German anti-fascists, for instance in Białystok,
i) The emancipatory role of the Soviet Army,
j) The new threat of war, etc.

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113 Official letter from S. Fiszgrund and B. Mark to J. Bogusz, 18 Oct. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

In order to preserve their own exhibition at Auschwitz, the representatives of Poland's Jewish community were thus willing to subordinate the meaning of the exhibition entirely to current ideological imperatives.

We do not know what changes were made in Block 4 prior to the opening of the new exhibition in November 1950. Perhaps by that time the Jewish exhibition had already been closed; if not, then this was only on account of the authorities' hurried preparations for the Second World Congress of Peace.

* * *

The history of the Jewish exhibitions at Majdanek and Auschwitz once again confirms the hypothesis put forward in the second chapter of the book. It shows that there was rivalry between "Polish" and "Jewish" remembrance in the immediate post-war years and that commemoration of the Holocaust gave rise to numerous controversies from the outset. The main protagonists in this conflict were Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust, represented by the CKŻP, CŻKH and other Jewish institutions, and Polish former concentration camp prisoners, represented by the PZbWP. Members of the PZbWP played a key role in several institutions dedicated to wartime remembrance, including the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and the Auschwitz Museum. These people were often indifferent to, or even hostile towards, the commemoration of crimes perpetrated on the Jewish population. In all likelihood this attitude stemmed largely from a sense of alienation and from concern that the fate of the Jews could overshadow their own suffering.

On the other hand, the cited examples reveal that, despite the conflicts, Jewish martyrdom found (albeit modest) expression in various memorial projects in Poland up until the end of the 1940s. This success should be attributed to the lobbying efforts of Jewish organisations and the "historical policy" of the Polish authorities, which at that time was still relatively liberal. However, the success of projects initiated by Jewish organisations depended to a large extent on local arrangements. Thus, in the case of the Museum at Majdanek, the management of which was composed of people unconnected with the camp, the creation of a Jewish exhibition encountered far fewer obstacles than in the case of the Auschwitz Museum, which was managed by former Auschwitz inmates. Nevertheless, even here the CKŻP ultimately managed to win some concessions.

It was not until the late 1940s and early 1950s that the subject of the Holocaust became a powerful taboo. One of the main reasons for this was the significant decline in Poland's Jewish population in the years 1947-1951. Successive waves of emigration saw the number of Jews living in Poland fall to between 57,000 and 80,000.[114] At the same time, as a result of top-down directives, all Jewish politi-

114 Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową", p. 424.

cal organisations and virtually all social and cultural institutions were liquidated; the only exceptions were the Jewish Historical Institute, created in the autumn of 1947, and the Social and Cultural Association of Jews, established in 1950. However, these two organisations were completely subordinate to the policies of the PPR/PZPR. Consequently, the Jewish community and the institutions that represented it ceased to perform the role of a separate "memory group" in Poland.

Although the closure of independent Jewish institutions was an element of the Stalinisation of public life in general, it was also the outcome of a change in the Communist Party's policy towards Poland's Jewish minority. This process was inspired by Moscow and had parallels in other Eastern bloc countries. With the emergence of the Iron Curtain and the creation of the state of Israel (1948)—a country favourably disposed towards the United States—the policy of the Soviet Union towards the Zionist movement, and thus also towards its own Jewish population, changed significantly. In 1948/1949, an anti-Semitic campaign initiated by the central authorities under the banner of the struggle against cosmopolitanism and Zionism took hold in the Soviet Union.[115] The prelude to the campaign was the murder in January 1948 of Solomon Mikhoels, a celebrated Jewish actor and chairman of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (*Yevreysky antifashistsky komitet*—YAK) established at the turn of 1941/1942 with the approval of the Kremlin. YAK was eventually disbanded in November 1948; members of its management were arrested and brought to trial in 1952. Extensive anti-Semitic purges were carried out in the USSR in the years 1949-1953, accompanied by an aggressive smear campaign in the press; the culminating point was to be the trial of Kremlin physicians accused of conspiring against their high-ranking patients. After the death of Stalin in March 1953, however, the case was dropped.

The events described above also found resonance in the Soviet Union's satellite countries, notably Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the GDR. Accusations of Zionist sympathies went hand in hand with accusations of Trotskyism, Titoism, and collaboration with foreign intelligence services. This made it possible to carry out purges within local communist parties and to eliminate political rivals. The pretext for the wave of persecutions was the arrest in May 1949 in Prague of Noel Field, director of the Unitarian Service Committee, who was suspected of spying for the United States.[116] Field was handed over to the Hungarian authorities

115 On the subject of the "anti-Zionist campaign" in the USSR and other countries of the Eastern bloc, see: Lustiger, *Czerwona księga*, pp. 237-322, 328-361 and the collection of articles and documents: *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936-1953*, Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert (eds), München-Wien-Zürich 2001.

116 On the subject of the Field affair, see the collection of documents: *Der Fall Field. Schlüsselfigur der Schauprozesse in Osteuropa*, Bernd-Rainer Barth and Werner Schweizer (eds), Berlin 2005.

in Budapest, where he was tortured. His testimony was then used as evidence in the trial of the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, László Rajk, in September 1949. Another element of the campaign was the show trial in 1952 in Prague of the secretary-general of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Rudolf Slánský, and 13 other party and government officials, the majority of whom were Jewish. Other, lower-ranking members of the party also suffered persecution.[117] In August 1950, the East German SED expelled a former member of its politburo, Paul Merker, who had publicly advocated that Germany pay compensation to Jewish Holocaust survivors.[118] Merker was arrested in 1952 in connection with the Slánský affair. In a secret trial conducted after the death of Stalin, Merker was denounced as a "Zionist agent" and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in 1955. Faced with the prospect of anti-Semitic purges, many Jews and people of Jewish origin emigrated from the GDR. In Poland, the "anti-Zionist campaign" took on a more moderate form, although here, too, purges were carried out in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Polish Army during the 1949-1951 period.[119] Arrests were made of Israeli embassy employees and representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The "struggle against Zionism" also found an outlet in the Polish media. Despite preparations, show trials following the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian examples did not take place, however.

The change in attitude towards the Jewish population in Eastern bloc countries also affected the way in which the history of the Second World War was presented. Many historians agree that, by 1948 at the latest, the subject of the Holocaust had become almost completely taboo in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries.[120] Although, as Zvi Gitelman notes, the extermination of the Jewish population was never completely denied, its unique character was questioned in light of the other atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War,

117 Karel Kaplan, František Svátek, "Politische Säuberungen in der KPÈ" in *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936-1953.*

118 Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, München 1989, pp. 184, 200.

119 Szaynok, "Walka z syjonizmem w Polsce", passim; idem, *Z historią i Moskwą w tle*, pp. 165-177, 206-244; Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, pp. 199-201.

120 On the subject of the memory of the Shoah in the USSR and other countries of the Eastern bloc, see, inter alia: Lustiger, *Czerwona księga*, pp. 141-150, 213-226; Zvi Gitelman, "History, Memory and Politics: The Holocaust in the Soviet Union", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, 1 (1990); idem, "The Soviet Politics of the Holocaust" in *The Art of Memory*; Al'man Il'ja, "Shoah: Gedenken verboten. Der weite Weg vom Sowjettabu zur Erinnerung", *Osteuropa* (Kluften der Erinnerung. Russland und Deutschland 60 Jahre nach dem Krieg) 55, 4-6 (2005); John Klier, "The Holocaust and the Soviet Union" in Dan Stone (ed.) *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Hampshire–New York 2004; Thomas C. Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism", ibid.

particularly the murder of Soviet citizens.[121] Somewhat telling in this regard is the history of the Black Book, prepared by YAK in cooperation with Jewish organisations in the USA and Palestine, which was to document the extermination of Jews in territories occupied by the Third Reich after 22 June 1941. With the Kremlin's consent, the gathering of materials for the Black Book commenced in 1943; its editors were the celebrated Soviet writers and war reporters Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman. During the course of their work, Ehrenburg and Grossman were pressured by the censors to make substantial cuts to the text. Among other things, they were ordered to delete all documents and personal accounts which pointed to the complicity of the Soviet population in the murder of Jews. In October 1947, publication of the Russian edition of the Black Book was halted and all existing copies were confiscated. The principal criticism of the book was that it gave the impression that it was only, or almost only, the Jews who had suffered persecution at the hands of the Nazis. The Black Book affair was also used as evidence during the YAK trial in May–July 1952.

Whereas during the Second World War YAK had managed to put on a photographic display devoted to the Holocaust, by the second half of the 1940s the subject was no longer tackled in historical exhibitions. The Jewish Museum in Vilnius, to which Ehrenburg had passed the materials for the Black Book, was closed down in 1948. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, countless monuments that had been erected after the war by Soviet Jews to commemorate Holocaust victims were either dismantled or remodelled to conceal the victims' identities. Although in 1946 a project arose to honour the victims of the mass executions at Babi Yar near Kiev, it was never implemented. A huge monument to the victims of the massacres was finally built in 1976, but this, too, failed to mention that the place was connected with the Final Solution. One of very few extant examples of post-war Holocaust remembrance in the Soviet Union is the memorial to the victims of the Minsk Ghetto, which was unveiled in 1947. Although, as Thomas C. Fox notes, even between the various Soviet republics there were major differences in the way the subject of the Holocaust was handled, by the late 1940s and early 1950s it had become taboo in almost all countries of the Eastern bloc.[122] It is in this context that we should consider the changes that occurred in Poland, and especially at the Auschwitz Museum, during that time.

121 Gitelman, "History, Memory and Politics", p. 26.
122 Fox, "The Holocaust under Communism".

Chapter 6
A Christian Monument to Jewish Martyrdom? An Unrealised Project from 1947 to Commemorate the Site of the Former Death Camp at Treblinka

In October 1947, the War Graves Department at the Ministry of Reconstruction in cooperation with the Committee for the Commemoration of Treblinka Victims (KUOT) announced a competition to commemorate the death camp at Treblinka II and the labour camp at Treblinka I. Two months later, the jury, which included representatives of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, the Ministry of Reconstruction, and the CKŻP, awarded first prize to two hitherto unknown architects, Władysław Niemiec (aka Niemirski) and Alfons Zielonko; their winning design was never implemented. Seventeen years had to elapse before a memorial—by Franciszek Duszeńko, Adam Haupt, and Franciszek Strynkiewicz—was built on the site of the former death camp.[1] In the pages to follow I shall discuss the genesis and iconography of Niemiec and Zielonko's project. This story exemplifies and supplements the themes touched upon in previous chapters concerning the rivalry between "Polish" memory and "Jewish" memory, and the search for an appropriate means of commemorating the victims of Nazi crimes.

The "Polish Klondike"[2]: Genesis of the Project

Unlike Majdanek and Auschwitz, where work on creating museums and monuments of martyrdom commenced soon after liberation, Treblinka, just like other death camps, was completely abandoned after the war; the only people to visit the camp were looters, mainly from among the local population.[3] One of the reasons for this was that very few people—approximately 70 in total—had sur-

1 Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, pp. 249-251.

2 Jerzy Rawicz, "Skończyć z tą hańbą", *Robotnik*, 22 Jul. 1947.

3 For more on this subject, see: Rusiniak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1944-1989)*, pp. 30-33; idem, "Treblinka—Eldorado Podlasia".

vived Treblinka. These people were not sufficiently numerous or influential to be able to enforce their demands concerning the commemoration of the site. The fact that Treblinka II was a place of execution exclusively for Jews and Roma is not without significance either. Indeed, this was the view taken by members of the Former Treblinka Prisoners' Group, who, at a meeting in the summer of 1945, complained that the site of the former extermination camp had not been secured and was being continually desecrated. According to the minutes of the meeting, "it was suggested that Treblinka was being neglected by the official institutions because it was specifically a Jewish camp".[4]

The commemoration of Treblinka was not a priority for the Polish authorities. Likewise, the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners (PZbWP) showed little interest in the matter. The only institution interested in safeguarding and commemorating the site of the camp was the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, but even for CKŻP members the matter was not of the utmost urgency. The committee was focused above all on the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument. The latter was much better suited as a symbol of Jewish heroism, for Treblinka—despite the courageous prisoner revolt of August 1943—was primarily seen as a place of crimes and suffering. Jewish organisations abroad also found it easier to obtain funds for Rapaport's project than for the commemoration of death camps.[5] Greater determination was shown in the creation of the Jewish exhibition at Auschwitz, which, for reasons previously explained, soon eclipsed other sites of wartime martyrdom. Besides, the task was greatly facilitated by the fact that a museum infrastructure already existed at Auschwitz.

Polish Jews undertook their first initiative to commemorate Treblinka a few months after the end of the war. At a session of the KRN in July 1945, a group of Jewish parliamentary deputies, including Michał Szuldenfrei and Adolf Berman, put forward a proposal to "erect a monument and establish a memorial museum at the place where Polish Jews were exterminated in Treblinka".6 However, as Szuldenfrei would later report to the CKŻP Presidium, the response was rather frosty.7 Although the proposal was passed on to the relevant parliamentary committee, no further action was taken.

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4 Minutes of the meeting of the Former Treblinka Prisoners' Group, 15 Jul. 1945 (Yiddish), AŻIH, Obozy 209/164. I am very grateful to Monika Polit for her translation of this document.

5 See, inter alia: the account of William Bein, representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Poland, of his trip to the USA (Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 1 Dec. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP, 303/I/8).

6 Shorthand minutes of the meetings of the KRN 21-23 Jul. 1945, AAN, Biuro Prezydialne KRN 10 (mcf. B-7679, VIII Sesja KRN 1945).

7 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 24 Jul. 1945, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/1-1b.

In the autumn of 1945, a special commission appointed by the GKBZNwP visited Treblinka with the aim of gathering materials for the trial of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg.[8] Aside from GKBZNwP representatives, the commission included members of the CŻKH as well as four survivors of the camp. The delegation was horrified by what it found at Treblinka. In a memo addressed to the CKŻP, the delegates wrote:

> [...] A throng of local people is digging up the sandy soil in order to uncover the treasures allegedly hidden within. As a result of these excavations, the earth, previously levelled and sown with lupine, has revealed its contents: a mass of unburned and decomposing human corpses and their belongings. That is why the ground is covered with human bones, human remains, and various items such as kitchen utensils, spoons, forks, rotting shoes, combs, liturgical items (candleholders), Jewish prayer shawls, etc. etc.[9]

The site was also plundered by soldiers from a Red Army unit stationed nearby, who detonated explosives in the mass graves in search of valuables. The authors of the memo urged the Jewish Committee to take action to secure the site of the former camp. In their view, the scene amounted to:

> […] the deliberate desecration of corpses and remains of people tortured by their Nazi executioners and the malicious destruction of evidence of Nazi crimes and atrocities. Such desecration dishonours and offends the feelings of Polish and world Jewry and brings the Polish state into disrepute. We must immediately end the desecration of this mass grave and place of execution of millions of defenceless and innocent Jewish victims—a place that is sacred to every Jew in Poland and around the world. Given these circumstances, we call upon the Central Committee of Jews in Poland to intervene urgently with the state authorities in order to secure and maintain the site of the Treblinka death camp where millions of Jews died a martyr's death.

The CKŻP alerted the Ministry of Public Administration, which, in turn, ordered the Provincial Governor of Warsaw to halt the desecration of mass graves and secure the evidence of crimes.[10] As a result, the Provincial Office summoned the District Governor of Sokołów to take care of the Treblinka site.[11] The effect of the intervention was minimal, however. At the beginning of 1946, the head of the

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8 Report by J. Maciejewski and Z. Łukaszkiwicz on their investigative work on the issue of the concentration camps in Treblinka, AIPN, Obozy 66. BŻAP: 98/108 (9 Nov. 1945) and 104/114 (23 Nov. 1945).

9 Official letter to the CKŻP with an appeal for action in regard to the site of the former camp in Treblinka, 10 Nov. 1945, AŻIH, Obozy 209/160.

10 Ministry of Public Administration (MAP) to the Provincial Governor of Warsaw, 12 Dec. 1945, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy, Urząd Woj., Wydz. Społeczno-Polityczny 259.

11 Head of the Social and Political Dept of the Provincial Office in Warsaw to the District Governor in Sokołów, 10 Jan. 1946, Archiwum m.st. Warszawy, Urząd Woj., Wydz. Społeczno-Polityczny 259.

Provincial Office's Social and Political Department sent a letter to the Ministry of Public Administration in which he denied the CKŻP's version of events. If the site was being dug up, he explained, it was because special units of the Polish Army were searching for victims' identity cards and other documents on the orders of the Ministry of Defence.[12] Although several dozen people were arrested in the same year for plundering mass graves at the site, they were subsequently released; the public prosecutor did not deem their behaviour to be criminal.[13] In the summer of 1947, Jerzy Rawicz published an article in *Robotnik* in which he described his impressions from a visit to the Siedlce region.

> The villages around Treblinka have been beautifully restored. Instead of ramshackle dwellings there are houses with tiled roofs. Where did those people get the money to do this? There were no special loans for the Treblinka district. [...] We walked across a field that was scattered with human remains: hands, feet, brains, skulls, shinbones. Human hair, not grass, sticks out of the soil. On the way back we met a group of people carrying sacks. They also had makeshift spades in the form of sticks with hooks attached. Still today, two years after the end of the war, these jackals and hyenas are digging up human remains in search of gold and other treasures. In this Polish Klondike there are even associations being created for the exploitation of given sites. They sublease the land. They feed on death. They desecrate corpses.[14]

The issue of safeguarding and commemorating Treblinka returned to the agenda of the CKŻP's meetings in the spring of 1947. The creation of a museum pavilion on the site, following the example of Majdanek, was one of the ideas discussed.[15] However, the committee lacked funds. Moreover, a project of this kind would require the approval of the Ministry of Art and Culture and other state institutions. It was decided, therefore, to intervene once again with the central authorities. On this occasion, the committee approached Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz directly.[16] Pressure from the CKŻP combined with constant press reports about the desecration of mass graves finally prompted the authorities to act.[17] As a result of a site inspection conducted in June 1947 by representatives of the central administration,

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12 Provincial Office in Warsaw to MAP, 6 Feb. 1946, Archiwum m. st. Warszawy, Urząd Woj., Wydz. Społeczno-Polityczny 259.

13 "Były obóz w Treblince" (text appended to an official letter from the Provincial Governor of Warsaw, Lucjusz Dura, to MAP), 2 Jun. 1947, AAN, MAP 664 (Mkf. B-1683).

14 Jerzy Rawicz, "Skończyć z tą hańbą", *Robotnik*, 22 Jul. 1947.

15 BŻAP 45/293, 15 May 1947.

16 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 6 Jun. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a.

17 See, inter alia.: "Ludzie czy hieny? Nie wolno profanować popiołów męczenników", *Polska Zbrojna*, 7 Sep. 1946; "Rozkopywali groby—bezcześcili zwłoki", *Głos Ludu*, 27 Oct. 1946 (cited after: Friedrich, *Der nationalsozialistische Judenmord in polnischen Augen,* p. 443).

the Warsaw Provincial Office, and the CŻKH, it was decided to appoint a special committee charged with raising funds and securing the site of the camp.[18] The first session of KUOT was held in the Polish Parliament building at the beginning of July 1947. Lucjusz Dura, the Provincial Governor of Warsaw, was appointed chairman. KUOT included CKŻP Presidium member Salo Fiszgrund, the head of the War Graves Department at the Ministry of Reconstruction, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Defence, and the National Council of Warsaw. The committee was to receive a state subsidy. In addition, an appeal for private donations was envisaged.

As the project to commemorate Treblinka was being developed, disputes arose within KUOT. The main conflict was between the CKŻP representatives and other members of the committee. At least some of the latter were unwilling to emphasise the Jewish identity of the camp's victims. During a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium held at the end of July 1947, Fiszgrund recounted his polemic against Governor Dura and the other committee members at the previous KUOT session. "In their view," said Fiszgrund, "Treblinka is not an international issue. I explained to them that 95 per cent of the victims of Treblinka were Jews."[19] In October, Fiszgrund complained that KUOT was "changing the way in which the victims are commemorated and the site is protected".[20] At the previous committee session, Fiszgrund continued, "I drew attention to the fact that the matter was being addressed incorrectly. What we want to avoid is the falsification of history. The KUOT members refuse to state the exact (or approximate) number of victims. And most important of all they are turning Treblinka into a place where people of various nationalities perished, yet it is a Jewish cemetery par excellence." Consequently, Fiszgrund suggested that the CKŻP should send a memo to the committee "clarifying the actual state of affairs". The suggestion was supported by Adolf Berman, who stressed that "Treblinka is the biggest Jewish cemetery in the world" and that it should be commemorated as such.

One disagreement within KUOT concerned the languages to be used for the inscriptions on the mausoleum. It was decided at one of the committee meet-

18 Provincial Governor of Warsaw, Lucjusz Dura, to the MBP, 13 Jun. 1947, IPN, KG MO 35/2677; Decision to appoint KUOT, no date, AAN, MAP 664 (Mcf. B-1683); report on the activity of the Ministry of Reconstruction for QIII 1947, AAN, Min. Odbudowy 158; AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7b: Minutes of the meetings of the CKŻP Presidium of 4, 10 and 29 July 1947; Minutes of the meeting of KUOT, 2 Oct. 1947, AAN, MAP 664 (Mcf. B-1683); BŻAP: 58/306 (20 Jun. 1947), 72/320 (31 Jul. 1947).

19 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 29 Jul. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7b.

20 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 9 Oct. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/8.

ings that the monument would have plaques affixed to it with inscriptions in ten languages: Polish, Russian, Yiddish, French, German, Czech, Hungarian, Greek, Dutch, and Hebrew.[21] The CKŻP Presidium saw this as yet another attempt to give the site a more international character and thus to downplay the Jewish identity of the camp's victims. Adolf Berman proposed that all the inscriptions in Treblinka should be in three languages only: Yiddish, Polish, and Hebrew.[22]

In October 1947, KUOT announced a closed competition to commemorate the death camp and labour camp in Treblinka. A conflict arose over who would be invited to participate. Members of the CŻKP wanted the competition to have a higher status. Adolf Berman believed that "the greatest Jewish sculptors from around the world" should enter.[23] The participation of famous Jewish artists would not only highlight the importance of Treblinka but would also emphasise the Jewish character of the place. In the end, Fiszgrund managed to force through Natan Rapaport's candidacy. Aside from Rapaport, seven other Polish sculptors and architects were invited to participate.[24] They were not well-known figures, although a few of them, such as Antoni Łyżwański and Franciszek Krzywda-Polkowski, had achieved a degree of recognition before the war.[25] The competition jury included a delegate from the Ministry of Reconstruction; the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom and secretary of the ROPWiM, Ludwik Rajewski; and Salo Fiszgrund from the CKŻP. Entries were submitted by only four teams of designers. Apart from the authors of the winning design, none of the authors of the designs are known. In all likelihood Natan Rapaport was not among them, since at that time he was completing work on the Warsaw Ghetto Monument.

The competition was adjudicated at the end of November 1947.[26] First prize was awarded to two novice architects, who had originally not even figured among the proposed candidates: Alfons Zielonko (1907-1999), later the vice-rector of

21 Minutes of the meeting of KUOT, 2 Oct. 1947, AAN, MAP 664 (Mcf. B-1683).

22 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 9 Oct. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/8.

23 Ibid.

24 Those invited to enter the competition were as follows: Antoni Łyżwański, Franciszek Masiak, Wincenty Kasprzycki, Alina Szolcówna, Michał Palutko, Ewa Śliwińska, and Franciszek Krzywda-Polkowski, who was later replaced by Alfons Zielonko. Minutes of the meeting of KUOT, 2 Oct. 1947, AAN, MAP 664 (Mcf. B-1683); AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/8: Minutes of the meetings of the CKŻP Presidium of 2 Oct. and 9 Dec. 1947.

25 On the subject of the artists invited to enter the competition, see: *Słownik Artystów Plastyków Okręgu Warszawskiego*, edited by Andrzej Jenota, Warszawa 1972; *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających*, edited by Jolanta Maurin-Białostocka, Warszawa 1971.

26 Report for QIV 1947, AAN, Min. Odbudowy 158; BŻAP 120/368, 4 Dec. 1947.

the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, who at that time was an assistant professor at the Department of Landscape Architecture with no major projects to his name; and Władysław Niemiec (aka Niemirski, 1914-2001), Zielonko's junior by several years, who did not graduate from the Department of Architecture at Warsaw Polytechnic until 1948. In later years Niemiec was primarily involved in landscape architecture. Among other projects, he designed the botanical garden in Powsin (1963) and collaborated on the Soviet Military Cemetery in Warsaw (1950).[27]

The two artists described their design as follows:

The site of the cemetery will be surrounded by a stone wall. The main entrance, situated on the north side, will give easy access to the railway and to the so-called "black road", which leads to Treblinka II.[28] *To the right of the main entrance will be the caretaker's lodge.*

Curved paths will lead from the main entrance to the extant foundations of the barracks, which will be specially protected.

Passing a series of monumental pylons, the broad main path will lead into the cemetery, to be shaped like a Star of Zion [sic].

The perimeter of the star will be marked with birches and the area beyond it planted with pines. The area within the star will have low-growing or trailing plants that are appropriate to sandy soil, such as heather, thyme, sedum, mullein, or juniper.

The main path will ascend steps to a square, on which will stand a sacrificial altar, a pool of water, and a 25-metre tall obelisk representing the Tablets of Moses, which will bear the inscription: Thou Shalt Not Kill. The plinth of the obelisk will be decorated with bas-reliefs. Beneath the obelisk, a passage will lead to a building housing a model of the camp reconstructed on the basis of a drawing made by J. Wiernik, a participant in the Treblinka revolt. The interior walls of the building will be covered with plaques describing the martyrdom of the Jews in ten languages. The floor tiles will be arranged in a pattern resembling the striped uniform worn by prisoners. Beyond the obelisk, deep within the memorial, will be a circular mausoleum covered by a cupola; on its external walls, slabs in the form of the Tablets of Moses will be repeated in a regular pattern.

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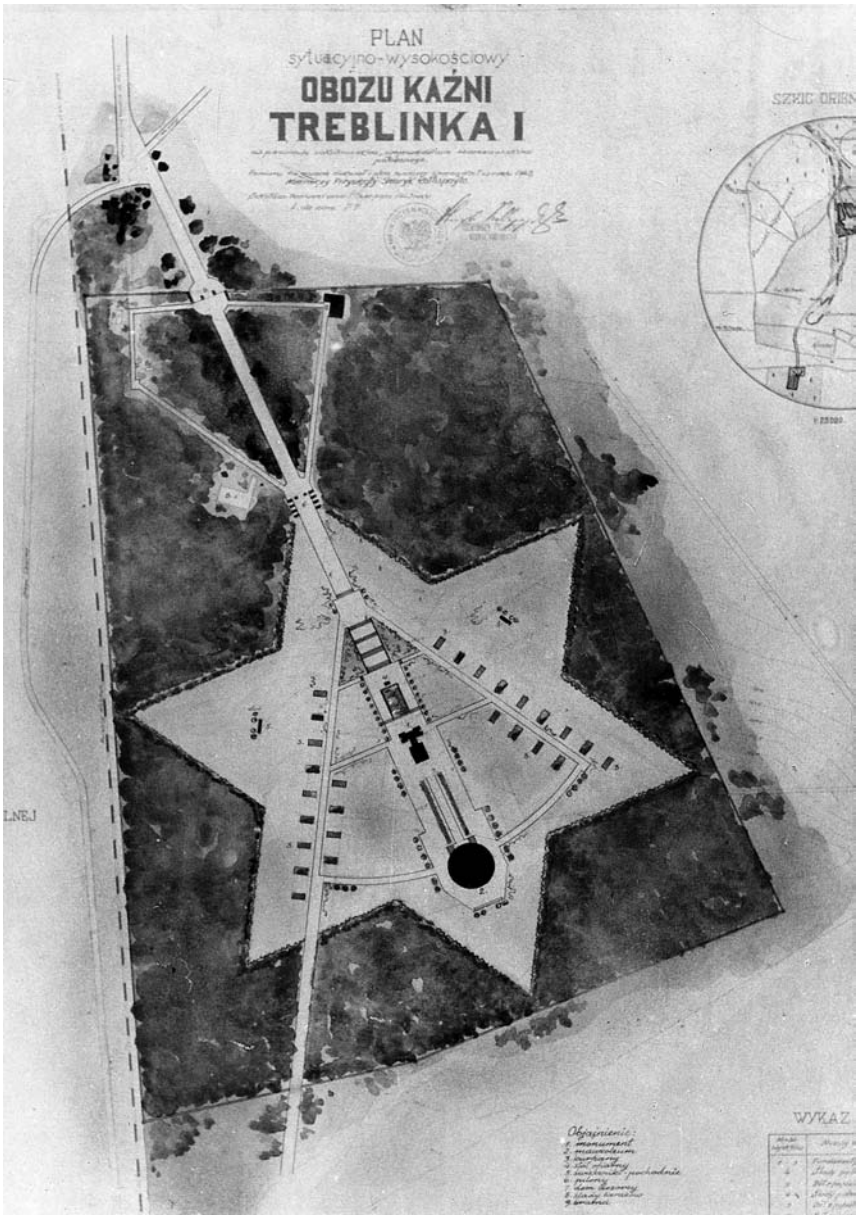
27 BŻAP 125/374-126/375, 22 Dec. 1947; Andrzej Leonard Nitsch, *Leksykon Architektów i Budowniczych Polaków oraz cudzoziemców w Polsce działających*, unpublished work in the collections of the Library of ZG SARP/Warszawa, pp. 21-23, 53-54; Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, p. 252.

28 In the document, the terms Treblinka I and Treblinka II are reversed. In commonly accepted nomenclature, the penal/labour camp built in 1940 is known as Treblinka I and the death camp, built in 1942, as Treblinka II, according to the sequence in which the two camps were erected.

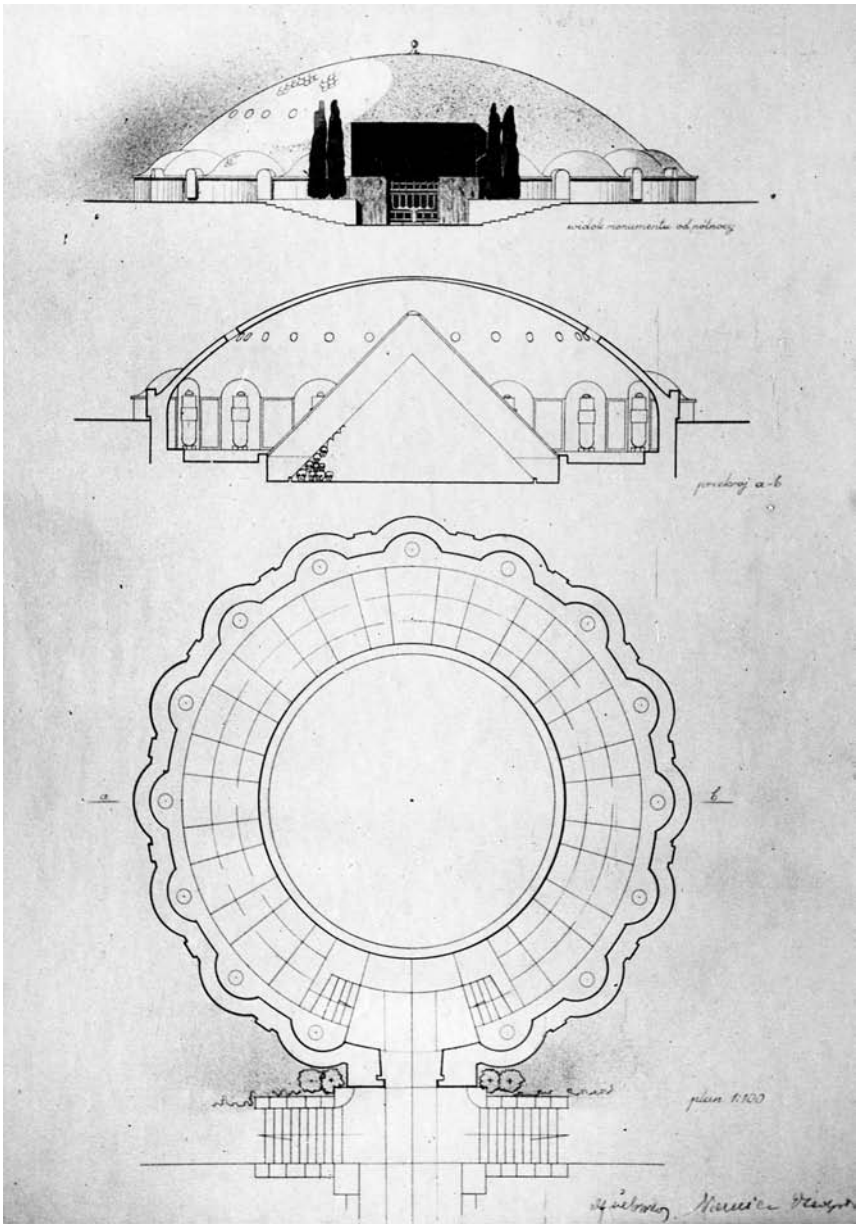
Bas reliefs will adorn the main entrance to the mausoleum and there will be a huge plaque describing the victims' ordeal in ten languages. The entrance itself will be a gate in the form of a seven-branched candelabrum. The interior of the mausoleum will be dimly lit in order to create a powerful impression.

Placed in the apses around the mausoleum will be urns containing the ashes of murdered children. Skulls arranged in the shape of a pyramid will be placed within a circular recess at the centre of the mausoleum, under a glass cover. Between the sacrificial altar and the mausoleum, the square will be planted on both sides with pyramid-shaped junipers. Just before the steps on the main route, paths will branch out. Placed along these paths will be walled burial mounds containing ashes collected from the site. Clumps of junipers, artistically arranged and serving a protective function, will be planted between the mounds.[29]

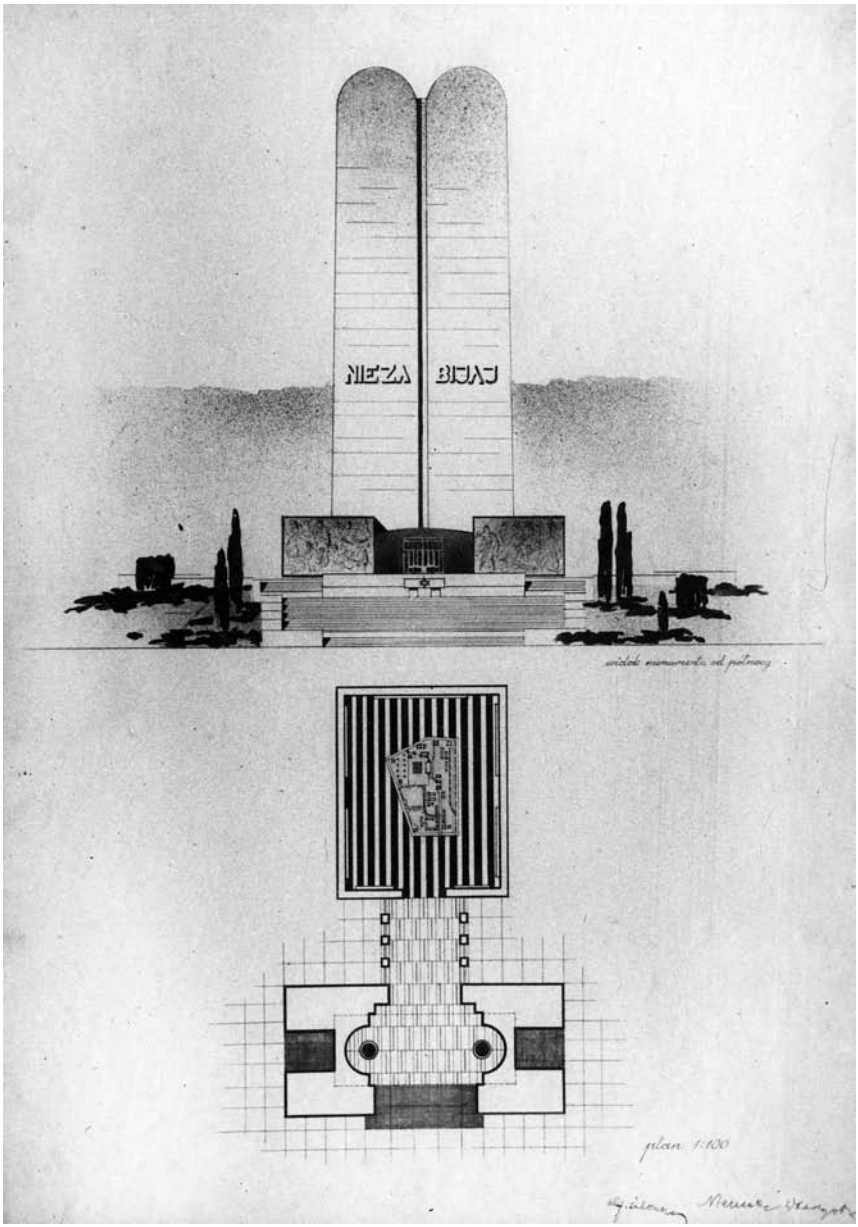
29 Władysław Niemiec and Alfons Zielonko, Design to Commemorate the Cemetery in the Camp of Executions of the Jewish Nation in Treblinka I and the Cemetery by the Penal Camp in Treblinka II, 10 Feb. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 33. A description of the design, including sketches, was also published in "Cmentarz obozu zagłady narodu żydowskiego w Treblince", *Architektura* 3 (1949), pp. 78-79.



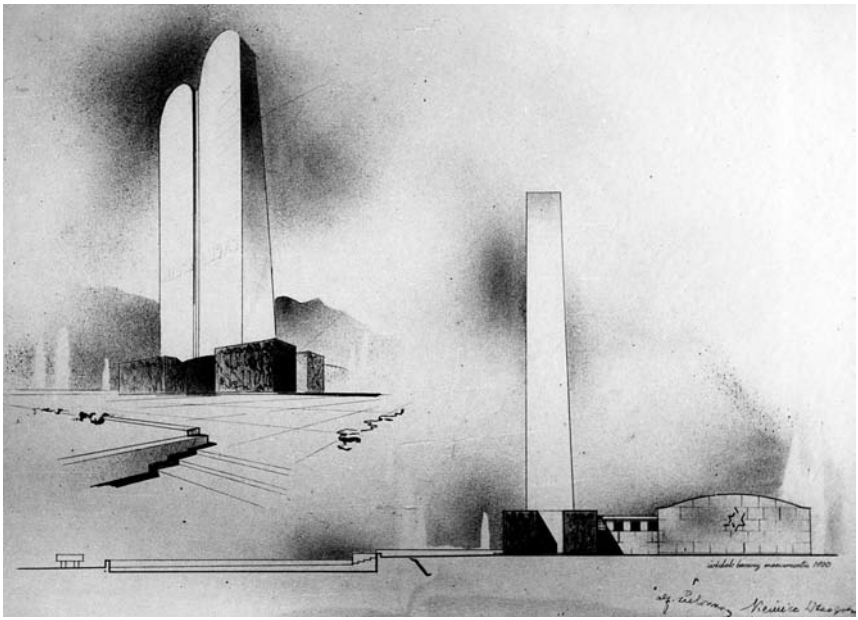
Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the monument on the site of the former extermination camp Treblinka II, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).



Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the monument on the site of the former extermination camp Treblinka II, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).



Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the monument on the site of the former extermination camp Treblinka II, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).



Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the monument on the site of the former extermination camp Treblinka II, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).

Iconography of the Memorial

The plan in Treblinka was to create not a single free-standing monument but a memorial that would entirely cover the site of the former camp, which the architects treated as a huge cemetery. The layout was to comprise several structures: an avenue of pylons, a pool of water, a sacrificial altar, 25-metre tall Tablets of Moses, a building housing a model of the camp, mounds containing ashes of the victims, and, finally, a huge mausoleum. The idea of creating a landscaped memorial to commemorate the site of a former concentration camp is not unique in Poland, although Niemiec and Zielonko's design was by far the earliest. The other landscaped memorials are the Monument and Mausoleum of Martyrdom (designed by Franciszek Duszeńko, Adam Haupt, and Franciszek Strynkiewicz), unveiled at Treblinka in 1964, and the Bełżec Memorial (designed by Andrzej Sołyga,

Zdzisław Pidek, and Marcin Roszczyk), completed in the spring of 2004.[30] Of a similar character, too, is Oskar Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, and Julian Pałka's unrealised design for a "Memorial Road" through Auschwitz-Birkenau, which won an award in 1958 during the second stage of an international competition to design a memorial for the camp.[31]

There is a fundamental difference, however, between Niemiec and Zielonko's design and those later projects: the landscaped memorials mentioned above were born of a quest to find new ways of communicating, through the medium of art, the experience of the Second World War, and in particular the experience of the Holocaust, which, by its very nature, destroyed all forms of expression previously adopted in European culture. By contrast, Niemiec and Zielonko's design appears remarkably conventional. It consists in the bringing together of various traditional forms of sepulchral art. Thus, we find a mausoleum, urns containing victims' ashes, and a pyramid of skulls whose gruesomeness recalls the chapels of the Baroque period. No less unimaginative are such elements as the avenue of pylons, the huge obelisk resembling the Tablets of Moses, and the burial mounds and pyramid-shaped junipers. Likewise, the slabs affixed to the external walls of the mausoleum, whose shape—according to the authors of the design—was meant to resemble the Tablets of Moses, actually look like *matzevot* (upright tombstones). In order to emphasise that Treblinka II was a place of Jewish martyrdom, the architects used the most obvious symbols of Jewish culture that would be understandable even to non-Jews: the Star of David, the *menorah*, and the Tablets of Moses.

It is characteristic that in the first years after the war very traditional methods of commemoration were used to honour the victims of concentration camps and death camps. Although many people were already aware of the unique nature of the crimes committed in the years 1939-1945, they were unable to find a suitable form of expression for them. One employee of the Ministry of Art and Culture captured the dilemma thus:

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30 Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, pp. 115-118; *Bełżec—hitlerowski obóz zagłady 1942*, catalogue published by the ROPWiM and the American Jewish Committee, Warszawa 2003.

31 On the subject of the designs created for the competition for an International Monument to the Victims of Fascism, see: Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa,* pp. 98-112; idem, "Konkursy na pomniki: Oświęcimski i Bohaterów Warszawy jako przykład kontrowersji między twórcą a odbiorcą" in *Sztuka Polska po 1945 roku*. Materials from a conference of art historians, Warsaw 1987, pp. 229-241; Jochen Spielmann, *Entwürfe zur Sinngebung des Sinnlosen. Zu einer Theorie des Denkmals als Manifestation des "kulturellen Gedächtnisses". Der Wettbewerb für ein Denkmal für Auschwitz*, Dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin 1990; Young, *The Texture of Memory*, pp. 133-141.

> The crimes perpetrated by the Nazis during the last war are such an unprecedented phenomenon in world history that work on commemorating the Polish martyrdom associated with them is not based on any artistic or ideological tradition—the designs have to be developed from scratch.[32]

This problem was not restricted to Poland. As Insa Eschebach notes:

> Compared to the buildings and monuments of the 1990s, which arose from a coming to terms with National Socialism, one clearly sees how strongly the monuments and inscriptions from the immediate post-war years […] refer to existing conventions and traditional images of the past. Unlike the case of contemporary monumental art […] after 1945 there was less focus on understanding the Nazi genocide as an historical first, as a collapse of civilisation (*Zivilisationsbruch*).[33]

Eschebach's observations primarily concern Germany, but they may be equally applied to other European countries. Indeed, projects that emerged after the war completely independently of one another, in various parts of the continent, often displayed strong similarities. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the cross was commonly used to commemorate victims. Obelisks were also very popular.[34] In Chapter Five (Cemeteries or "Battlefields"?), I described a design of 1950 for a provisional monument to commemorate Birkenau; its form alluded to a design drawn up in captivity by the Auschwitz inmate and subsequent PMOB employee Jerzy Brandhuber. After the war, Brandhuber wanted to erect within Birkenau a huge, square chimney topped by an eternal flame.[35] Placed around the chimney would be a series of stones symbolising prisoners standing for roll-call. The design of 1950, however, envisaged a monument of far more modest proportions: resting on a platform, surrounded by trees and flanked by candles, it was to resemble a traditional obelisk rather than a crematorium chimney. Strikingly similar to this was a monument raised in April 1945—barely a few days after liberation—by former inmates of Buchenwald. Standing on a multi-level platform, it took the form of an obelisk nailed together with wood and bearing the letters KLB (*Konzentrationslager Buchenwald*) as well as the number 51,000, which denoted the number of victims of the camp.[36]Another common form of commemorating

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32 Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, undated, unsigned note probably from the turn of 1947/1948, AAN, MKiS, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 1.

33 Insa Eschebach, "Zur Formensprache der Totenehrung. Ravensbrück in der frühen Nachkriegszeit" in *Die Sprache des Gedenkens*, p. 32.

34 Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, s. 13.

35 Janina Jaworska, *„Nie wszystek umrę..." Twórczość plastyczna Polaków w hitlerowskich więzieniach i obozach koncentracyjnych 1939-1945*, Warszawa 1975, p. 50.

36 According to the accounts of some former prisoners, on the rear face of the obelisk, somebody added the word "Juden" (Jews). Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg", pp. 8-9.

the victims of Nazi concentration camps was a monument in the shape of an urn. This was the form given to the first provisional monument raised in 1947 in one of the blocks in Auschwitz I.[37] A similar monument is to be found in the cemetery in Willmersdorf near Berlin, where the ashes of the victims of Sachsenhausen and Wawelsberg were buried.[38]

Although the purpose of these conventional monuments was symbolically to restore to the victims the dignity denied to them by the Nazis, the monuments usually said nothing about the vast number of victims or the manner of their death. Władysław Niemiec and Alfons Zielonko were clearly aware of this problem. They, too, used traditional forms of sepulchral art, but they tried to emphasise both the identity of the victims and the genocidal nature of the crimes by bringing together diverse forms of remembrance and opting for monumental dimensions.

The layout of the various elements is not accidental. The Treblinka memorial was to take the form of a road leading from the spot where the entrance gates once stood to the gas chambers and mass graves. This would enable the visitor to retrace the route taken by the victims, thus symbolically repeating their path of suffering. In actual fact, the condemned were not led through the main gates; the transports would arrive at a railway platform located to the south of the camp. The victims were then led directly from the platform to the gas chambers, so they never saw the administrative areas of the camp. Nevertheless, a visitor to Treblinka could travel in the same direction as the victims before finally reaching the last "circle of hell", namely, the death camp proper, with its gas chambers, fire pits, and mass graves. Visitors unfamiliar with the history of the place could enhance their knowledge by studying a model of the camp and reading a description of the "martyrdom of the Jews", which would be found in a building behind the obelisk—in other words, halfway between the entrance to the cemetery and the mausoleum.

The architects' intention was that visitors to Treblinka would climb the steps to a square on which stood a monumental obelisk in the form of the Tablets of Moses. In order to enter the passageway underneath the obelisk leading to a building housing a model of the camp, the visitor would have to walk past a pool of water and a sacrificial altar. Next, having seen the model of the camp, the visitor would proceed to the mausoleum. These four elements—an ascending path, a pool of water resembling a baptistery or *mikveh*, a sacrificial altar, and a mausoleum—lend the place a transcendental aspect: it becomes a sanctuary holding holy relics and the visitor becomes a pilgrim. The path does not lead downwards into the earth, for this would symbolise a descent into the abyss—into the depths of crimes and suffering. The latter approach was adopted in many later designs

37 APMAB, Fotografie, nr neg. 03440.

38 Knigge, "Opfer, Tat, Aufstieg", p. 14.

for the commemoration of concentration and death camp victims, such as the Jewish Memorial at Dachau (designed by Hermann Guttmann) erected in 1964-67 and the Bełżec Memorial of 2004.[39] A similar idea surfaced in several of the entries for the international competition to design a memorial at Auschwitz-Birkenau (1958-1967).[40] In Niemiec and Zielonko's design, however, the path leads upwards towards a mausoleum situated on a platform. In this way, Treblinka is not transformed into a cursed place, "a heap forever" (Hebrew: *tel olam,* Joshua 8:28), but instead becomes a place sanctified by the sacrifice of blood. The sacrificial altar placed before the obelisk seems to emphasise the monument's message: that the people murdered at Treblinka did not die in vain and that their sacrifice of life will, in God's plan, serve to reform and redeem humanity and, at the individual level, to reform those visiting the place as pilgrims. However, in order to experience this contact with the divine, the visitor to Treblinka first has to undergo cleansing, symbolised here by a pool of water.[41]

Although in this memorial design the victims of the camp are portrayed as martyrs, it would be hard to speak of their glorification. One element that could be interpreted as an attempt to show the murdered as heroes is the avenue of pylons by the entrance to the cemetery. Aside from this, however, the memorial emphasises—for instance, through the invocation "Thou Shalt Not Kill!" inscribed on the Tablets of Moses and the human ashes and remains displayed in the mausoleum—not so much the heroism of the victims as their innocence and the cruelty of their tormentors. The design contains no reference at all to the prisoner revolt of 2 August 1943. One can only assume that it would have been mentioned in the potted history of Treblinka which was to be displayed in the building containing a model of the camp. Nor do we know what was to be depicted in the bas reliefs covering the plinth of the obelisk. What is certain, however, is that the heroism of the victims was never meant to be a key element of the memorial overall. On the contrary, given that Niemiec and Zielonko intended to place urns containing "the ashes of murdered children" in the mausoleum apses, they clearly wanted to highlight the innocence of the victims. If, in the eyes of the authors, the Treblinka victim possessed a redemptive power, this was his innocence, not his heroism. This interpretation is confirmed by Zielonko's own words. At a meeting with representatives of the CKŻP, he said that his aim "was for the mausoleum and the

39 Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, pp. 266-270, 282-285, figs 63, 64; *Bełżec—hitlerowski obóz zagłady 1942.*

40 Spielmann, *Entwürfe zur Sinngebung des Sinnlosen*, pp. 115-126; Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, pp. 101-102.

41 On the subject of the symbolic significance of the altar, and the religious symbolism of water in Judaism and Christianity, see: Manfred Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, Poznań 1989.

architectural topography of the site to bear witness to the Nazis' crimes and to instil in visitors a feeling of solidarity with the victims".[42]

The message of Niemiec and Zielonko's design differs from that of many subsequent Polish "monuments of struggle and martyrdom", including the Birkenau monument of 1967, at the base of which a plaque proclaimed that the "heroes of Auschwitz" had been awarded the Order of the Cross of Grunwald (1st Class).[43] Niemiec and Zielonko's design also speaks differently about the Holocaust than the Warsaw Ghetto Monument unveiled in April 1948 and the modest monument erected in Birkenau in that same month[44]; the latter bore the inscription: "In memory of the millions of Jews, martyrs, and fighters exterminated in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp as a result of Nazi genocide in the years 1940-1945". A Jewish periodical of the time explained that both monuments were meant to honour the victims of genocide as well as the heroes of the resistance movement in the ghettos and camps.[45] The CKŻP intended to put up a plaque with a similar inscription at the Treblinka site.[46] That some former Treblinka inmates and participants of the revolt wanted to glorify their own actions is shown by a letter from Jankiel Wiernik published in the summer of 1947 in *Głosu Bundu* [Voice of the Bund], in which the author suggested that 2 August should be declared an international holiday.[47]

Niemiec and Zielonko's design clearly defined Treblinka as a place where Jews were exterminated. It is worth considering, however, to what extent the design conformed to the Jewish burial tradition and to interpretations of the Shoah that emerged from Judaism, and to what extent it reflected a Polish or Christian point of view. Since the memorial's message is unambiguously religious, I shall restrict my analysis to theological interpretations. It is a difficult issue to address because within Jewish theology there exist many different ways of explaining the Holocaust, some of which are diametrically opposed to one another.[48]

We do not know the ethnic or religious background of the design's authors, but there is much to suggest that they were rooted in the Christian tradition and that the memorial was primarily addressed to Poles. What is surprising is that in

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42 BŻAP 125/374-126/375, 22 Dec. 1947.

43 Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa*, p. 235.

44 On the subject of the message of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument see: Young, *The Texture of Memory*, pp. 163-174.

45 "Odsłonięcie pomnika męczeństwa w Oświęcimiu", *Opinia*, 7 May 1948.

46 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 31 Mar. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

47 Jankiel Wiernik, "O buncie w Treblince", *Głos Bundu*, 15 Aug. 1947.

48 See: Stanisław Krajewski, "Żydowskie teologie zagłady" in idem, *Żydzi, judaizm, Polska*; Jonathan Sacks, "Cienista dolina. Holocaust w kontekście judaizmu", *Znak* 507 (1997); Stefan Schreiner, "Żydowska myśl teologiczna po Oświęcimiu", *Znak* 313 (1980).

a sketch of the design, the sixth commandment ("Thou Shalt not Kill") inscribed on the stone obelisk appears only in Polish.[49] The manner in which the architects intended to treat the ashes of the victims runs contrary to Jewish tradition. The exhumation of corpses is forbidden within Judaism, so the idea of gathering the victims' remains and putting them on public view could have raised serious concerns among Jews.[50] It would seem, however, that a more pertinent question is to what extent the architects' interpretation of Treblinka was in keeping with the way the Shoah is explained within Judaism.

Stanisław Krajewski distinguishes four main interpretations of the Holocaust in Jewish theology:

– "for our sins" interpretations, the majority in a traditionalist spirit, which assimilate the Shoah into Jewish history as yet another gigantic pogrom;
– instrumental interpretations ("for your sins"), which see the Holocaust as a punishment for improper Jewish ideologies or as the basis for a new phase in the history of Israel;
– "for their sins" interpretations, based on the traditional idea of a non-interventionist God who gives humanity free will and for whom Jews are the victims of evil perpetrated by others;
– extreme interpretations ("there is no sin"), which speak of the "death of God" and the end of Judaism.[51]

Niemiec and Zielonko's design does not fit any of the above interpretations. The Holocaust is not presented as a punishment for sins; on the contrary, the innocence of the victims is emphasised. Nor is the Holocaust a result of the evil within Man or of a non-interventionist God who grants free will. Although the architects condemn the perpetrators, the Holocaust is itself treated as a victim that is to contribute to the redemption of humanity. In this way, Niemiec and Zielonko give a positive meaning to the suffering and death of the Treblinka victims.

The Hebrew Bible does not recognise the sacrifice of human life. In Judaism, human sacrifice was replaced with animal sacrifice (Leviticus 1:3; Deuteronomy 12:17-18, 15:19-20), and the latter has not been practised since the destruction of the Second Temple.[52] Although the genocide of the Jews during the Second

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49 In the description of the project published in the ŻAP Bulletin, the Hebrew version of the commandment was also given: "Lo tirtzakh" (BŻAP 120/368, 4 Dec. 1947).

50 Earlier, some CKŻP members had proposed pouring concrete over the site in order to protect the corpses from profanation. This was done in 1964. See: Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 19 May 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/7a.

51 Krajewski, "Żydowskie teologie zagłady", p. 288.

52 On the subject of how the concept of sacrifice is understood in Judaism, see: Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*; Foreword and footnotes in *Tora Pardes Lauder. Księga trzecia Wajikra*, edited and translated by Rabin Sacha Pecaric, Kraków 2005,

World War is commonly referred to as "the Holocaust", which derives from the Greek *holokaútoma*, meaning "burnt offering", the term is rejected as inadequate by many philosophers and theologians, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.[53] The word *holokaútoma* was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in relation to the sacrifice of Isaac. In the theology of Judaism, the sacrifice of Isaac is described by the term *aquedah*, which means "shackling" or "binding". This term indicates that the sacrifice was not in fact made: Abraham does not sacrifice his son Isaac; on God's command, he sacrifices a ram instead (Genesis 22). That is why in Jewish theology the Binding of Isaac is interpreted primarily as a test of faith, and not as a sacrifice.[54]

In Judaism, however, there is the concept of martyrdom for the faith (*kiddush hashem*, literally, "the sanctification of God's name"). Although, during the Second World War, Jews were persecuted as Jews and were usually not given the choice of whether to keep their faith and traditions or to renounce them and were condemned to death regardless, the concept of martyrdom for the faith is sometimes used in relation to the victims of the Holocaust; it also occurs in early texts on the subject of Treblinka.[55] One of Rachela Auerbach's articles for *Nasze Słowo* includes a "parable" about the conduct of Warsaw Jews who had been sent to Treblinka. The author cites the words of a prayer that one of the women was to have uttered in the face of death:

> *Reboyne shel oylem*, Lord of the Universe (she cried), look at our suffering and look at the suffering of our small and innocent children. Turn us away from sin and purge us

pp. V-VII, 5-7. In this recently published Polish translation of the Torah, Rabbi Sacha Pecaric translates the Hebrew notion of *korban* not as "sacrifice" (*ofiara*), but as "surrender" (*oddanie*) or "approaching" (*przybliżenie*). The editor also draws attention to the unsuitability of the widely accepted translation of this notion as "sacrifice", pointing to the etymology of the word and to the essential significance in Judaism of the ritual of slaughter of animals in the Temple before God. As a supplementary argument against the use of the word "*ofiara*" in the Polish translation of the Torah, Rabbi Pecaric cites the many connotations present in this word, which can cause vagueness in interpretation.

53 On the subject of the meaning of the term "Holocaust", see: Schreiner, "Żydowska myśl teologiczna po Oświęcimiu", pp. 901-902; Panas, "Szoah w literaturze polskiej", pp. 37-38.

54 On the subject of the interpretation of the "sacrifice of Isaac" in Jewish theology, see: Schreiner, "Żydowska myśl teologiczna po Oświęcimiu", p. 904.

55 On the subject of the term *kiddush hashem* and its use in relation to the victims of the Shoah, see: Krajewski, "Żydowska teologia Zagłady", pp. 284-286 and Sacks, "Cienista dolina", pp. 18-19 et al.

> of impurity in the hour of our death. And as we perish *al kiddush hashem*, for the sanctification of your name, so accept us and let us sit by your throne in your presence.[56]

It does not seem likely, however, that the authors of the memorial design were referring to the concept of *kiddush hashem*. Indeed, by invoking murdered children to emphasise the innocence of the victims, they at once emphasised the non-intentionality of their death. The interpretation of the Holocaust offered—perhaps not altogether consciously—by Niemiec and Zielonko seems closer to Christian thought, although this, too, is far from being theologically accurate. Their memorial design draws a parallel between the victims of Treblinka and Christ's sacrifice. In accordance with Christian dogma, the death of Christ, the "Lamb of God", served to redeem humanity of its sins; by analogy, the death of the Treblinka victims would either reform humanity or lead to its salvation. Although, as Manfred Lurker writes, "the redemptive death of Christ on the cross is the only blood sacrifice known to Christianity"[57], the sacrifice of the "Son of Man" nevertheless lies at the heart of the Christian faith and is repeated in the sacrament of the Eucharist; thus it would seem closer to Christian rather than to Jewish religious ideas. The Catholic writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka also saw the experience of the camps as a sacrifice whose purpose was to redeem humanity. In her fictionalised camp memoir, she wrote: "A concentration camp transformed into a sacrificial altar and tossed in with the Passion of the Son of God would surely be enough to save the world."[58]

For the sake of comparison, it is worth mentioning here the monument erected in the summer of 1947 at the Jewish exhibition in Auschwitz, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. In a niche draped with black fabric, flanked on both sides by double columns, stood a nine-branched candelabrum (*hanukiah*) atop a black sarcophagus-like platform; above it, suspended from the wall, was a dove flying upwards to the heavens. The Hebrew inscription above the niche read: *yizkor* (remember).[59] This modest monument, designed by Jewish artists, did not attempt to lend meaning to Birkenau; it merely expressed grief for those who had perished and the joy of those who had survived. The *hanukiah*, which recalls the Maccabean victory over the Seleucids and the cleansing of the Temple (1 Maccabees 4:36-61), and the soaring dove, which signifies hope and reconciliation with God (Genesis 8:10-11), may be interpreted as symbols of the ultimate victory of good over evil and of the salvation of Israel. These two elements can also be interpreted in another way: the *hanukiah* as determining the national identity

56 R. Auerbach, "Kadisz", *Nasze Słowo*, 31 Dec. 1946.
57 Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, p. 149.
58 Kossak-Szczucka, *Z otchłani*, p. 201.
59 APMAB, Fotografie, nr neg. 03438.

of the victims, and the dove as a symbol of the "souls of the martyrs".[60] However, the central message of the monument was the exhortation to remember (*yizkor*).[61] Equally restrained in its attempt to make sense of the Holocaust was the monument in the Jewish barrack at Majdanek, which appeared a year later and which is described in Chapter Five.

As Stanisław Krajewski notes, "the Second World War caused many Jews to illustrate the Jewish tragedy using the cross and the crucifix whilst emphasising the Jewish characteristics of the crucified victim".[62] The best-known example of this is the art of Chagall; similar depictions are found in literature.[63] Krajewski interprets this as an attempt to "reach the conscience of Christians, Europeans, and Americans through the symbolism they know best and to introduce the iconography of the Holocaust into mainstream European art".[64] The explanation Krajewski offers seems rather simplistic, though. It is worth recalling here Rabbi Ignaz Maybaum, who, in his book *The Face of God after Auschwitz*, describes Auschwitz as "The Golgotha of modern mankind",[65] This Jewish philosopher and theologian argues that, during the Second World War, Jews suffered vicariously for the sins of mankind and that the Shoah marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Jewish nation and of the world in general. However, "the fact that sacrifice was needed to achieve this new stage in history is, in Maybaum's view, clearly a legacy of the Christian tradition. The cross on Golgotha is the central symbol of Christianity, and yet this symbol says: 'One man must die so that others may live!'. Therefore, the Jews were crucified to save the lives of others!"[66] Thus, in Maybaum's interpretation, too, Jews became victims from the Christian perspective, and his argument can even be understood as an indictment. In the case of Niemiec and Zielonko's memorial design, however, the intention seems to have been different. The authors refrained from the explicit use of Christian symbolism. Clearly, their aim was not to blame Christians or to appeal to their consciences by pointing to the analogy between the Shoah and the death of Christ

60 This was the interpretation of the iconography of the monument cited in: BŻAP 60/308, 27 Jun. 1947.

61 On the subject of the meaning of memory in Judaism, see: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Znaczenie w historii, pamięć i pisanie historii. Podstawy biblijne i rabiniczne", *Konteksty* 1-2 (2003).

62 Krajewski, "Żydowska teologia Zagłady", p. 274.

63 On this subject see: Alina Molisak and Aleksandra Sekuła, „Wątki biblijne w literaturze o Zagładzie. Wybrane przykłady" in Michał Głowiński et al. (eds) *Stosowność i forma*, *Jak opowiadać o Zagładzie?*, Kraków 2005, pp. 131-144.

64 Krajewski, "Żydowska teologia Zagłady", p. 274.

65 Ibid, pp. 272-273; Schreiner, "Żydowska myśl teologiczna po Oświęcimiu", p. 902. Both authors cite Maybaum's book *The Face of God after Auschwitz* (London 1965).

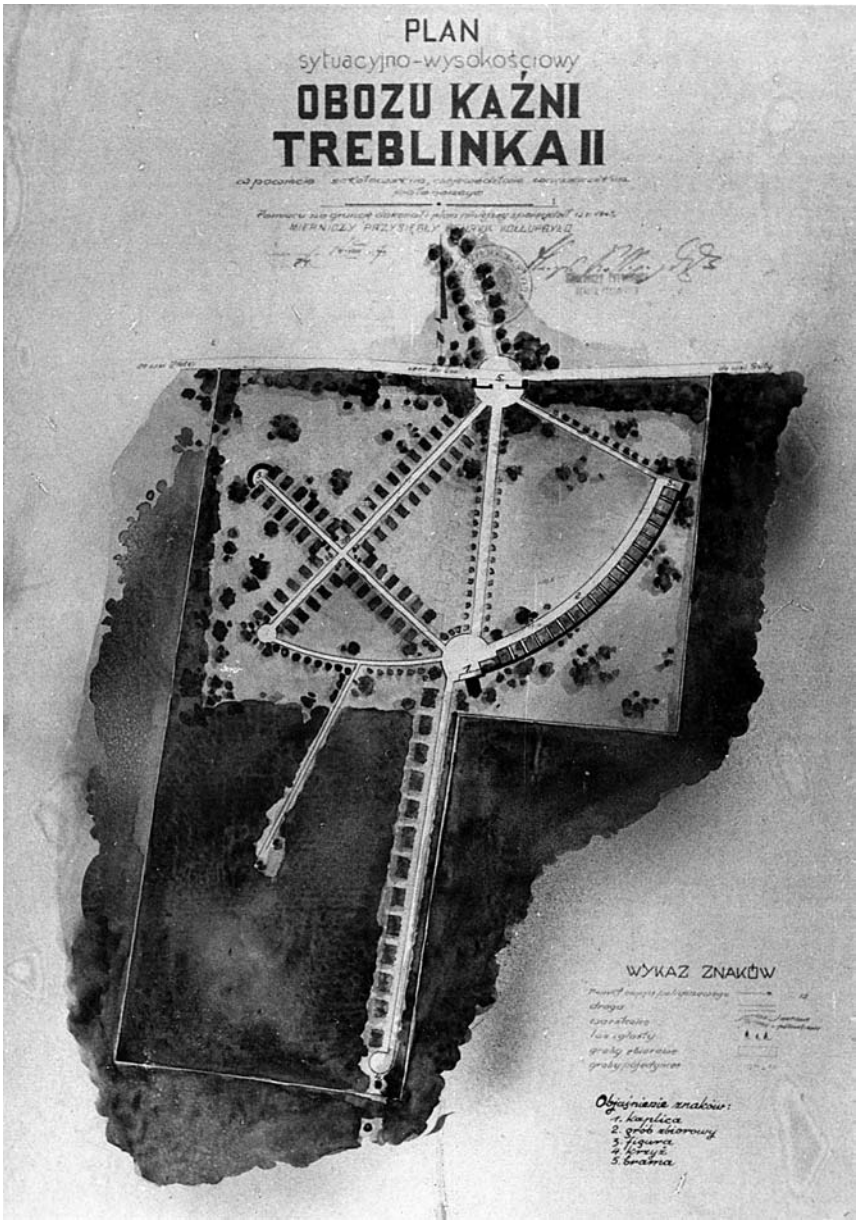
66 Schreiner, "Żydowska myśl teologiczna po Oświęcimiu", p. 903.

on the cross. On the contrary, in wanting to create the most Jewish monument possible, Niemiec and Zielonko used the interpretation that was closest to them, and they did so in a completely natural way.

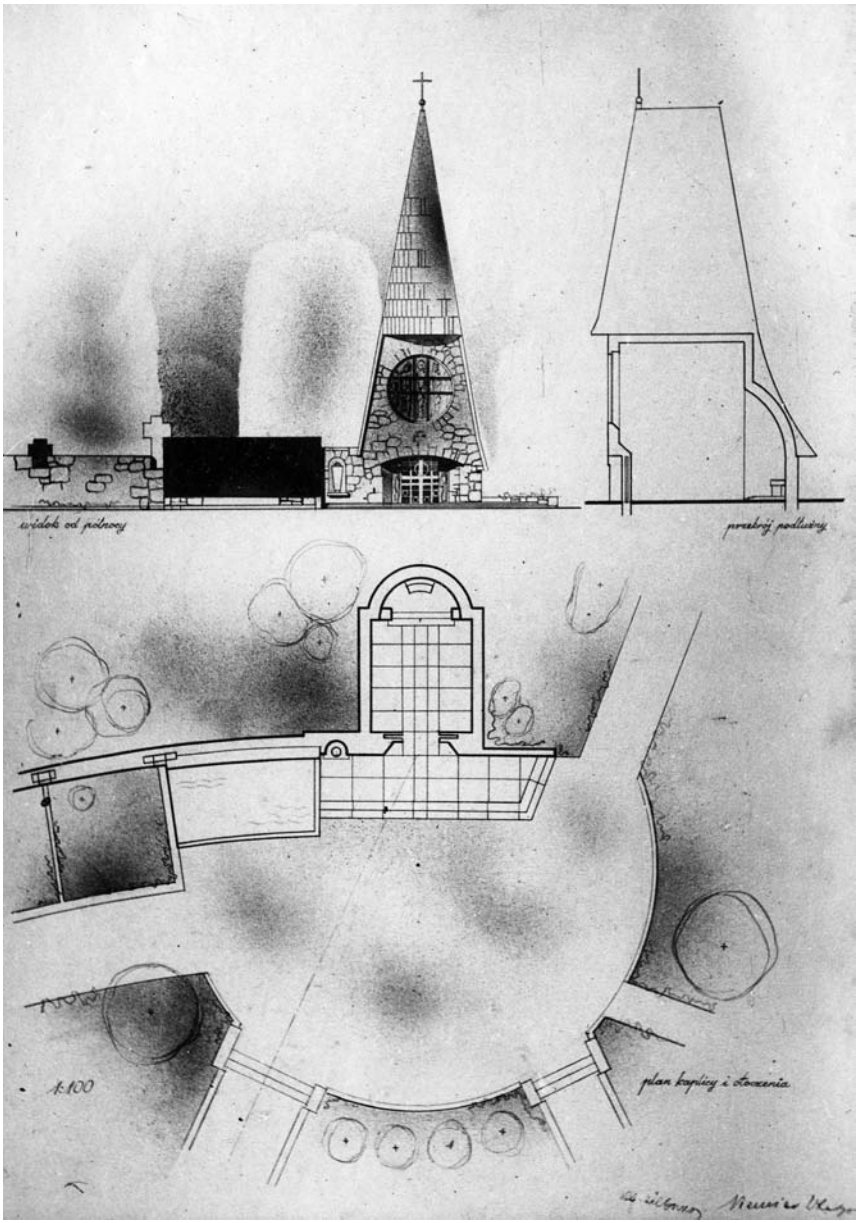
At this juncture, it is worth mentioning another design by the same artists which was to commemorate the cemetery by Treblinka I, the former penal camp and labour camp. Their description of it reads as follows:

The cemetery will be enclosed by a wall of granite fieldstone. From the entrance gate, the main path, planted with junipers, will lead through an open area giving views onto a chapel made of stone blocks. To the east of the chapel, a semicircular wall crowned by an allegorical figure will bear the words "Requiescat in Pace" and a series of crosses. Placed before the wall will be graves containing exhumed remains, framed by a stone curb; the graves will be planted with wild flowers. A plaque situated between the chapel and the wall will describe the ordeal suffered by the prisoners of the penal camp. A pool of water will be situated before the plaque. On the opposite side of the wall, a great cross will be formed of paths planted with clusters of junipers in the form of rhythmically repeated blocks. The arms of the cross will afford views at one end of an apse decorated with bas reliefs and at the other of clusters of white birches. The glade will have low-growing plants such as heather or thyme as well as occasional clusters of trees or shrubs characteristic of the given landscape.[67]

67 Niemiec and Zielonko, Design to Commemorate the Cemetery in the Camp of Executions of the Jewish Nation in Treblinka I and the Cemetery by the Penal Camp in Treblinka II, 10 Feb. 1948, AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 33.



Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the cemetery at the former Nazi labour camp Treblinka I, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).



Design by Alfons Zielonko and Władysław Niemiec for the cemetery at the former Nazi labour camp Treblinka I, 1947-1948 (courtesy of AAN).

These references to Christian tradition—now completely overt—support the claim that it was precisely from Christianity that the architects drew their inspiration. It is also plain to see that Niemiec and Zielonko made a simple distinction between Treblinka I—the place where Poles and Christians were exterminated, and Treblinka II—the place where Jews were exterminated. Although such a division is somewhat simplistic since there had also been Jews amongst the inmates of Treblinka I, one must concede that the architects, through the form and scale of their memorial designs, tried to represent the different history of the two places. Through their arrangement of the cemetery at Treblinka I, Niemiec and Zielonko wanted to allow the victims of the camp to be commemorated with dignity; and, by turning Treblinka II into a mausoleum, they wanted to highlight the uniqueness of the crimes committed there, expressed both in the huge number of victims and in the manner of their killing.

Although it was hard to reconcile the symbolism with Jewish interpretations of the Holocaust, the design was well received by the Presidium of the CKŻP. During a meeting with Zielonko, the committee members expressed their belief that "the artist has a deep understanding of the great tragedy of the Jewish nation and has found an artistic form to reflect it that is completely appropriate".[68] The CKŻP also decided to bear some of the cost of building the mausoleum.[69] In 1957, in response to the announcement of a new competition to commemorate the death camp in Treblinka, Salo Fiszgrund stated at a meeting of the ROPWiM that "ten years ago there was a very good design for a memorial at Treblinka, but it was never implemented".[70] Both he and other members of the CKŻP Presidium must have been pleased that, after so many conflicts, the approved design had unequivocally treated Treblinka as a place where Jews were massacred.

The precise reason why the design was never implemented is not known. At a meeting of the CKŻP Presidium convened in February 1948, Fiszgrund, reporting on the situation at Treblinka, stated that there had been personnel changes in KUOT, that its meetings had become less frequent, and that work on the construction of the mausoleum had been halted.[71] It was decided to intervene in this matter with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Culture, and the chairman of the

68 BŻAP 125/374-126/375, 22 Dec. 1947.

69 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 9 Dec. 1947, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/8; Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 26 Feb. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9.

70 Minutes of the extended meeting of the ROPWiM Presidium, 27 Dec. 1957, AAN, MKiS, Gabinet Min. 92.

71 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 26 Feb. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9. There was indeed a representative of the KC PPR in KUOT (BŻAP 32/408, 9 Apr. 1948).

ROPWiM. The CKŻP wanted, at the very least, to force the authorities to clean up the site and put up a commemorative plaque prior to an event marking the anniversary of the start of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which was planned for April of that year. However, these plans likewise proved abortive.[72] The last mention of KUOT dates from June 1948.[73]

Most probably, the fate of Niemiec and Zielonko's design was sealed not only by the high cost of its implementation but also by ideological concerns. It seems completely unthinkable that a memorial with that kind of message could have been built in Poland after 1948/1949. First, as mentioned previously, the subject of the Holocaust had become completely taboo in Poland by the end of the 1940s. Second, as the Stalinisation of the country progressed, wartime remembrance gradually moved away from religious symbolism. Third, "the struggle against victimhood" announced by the Communist authorities shifted the emphasis away from martyrdom towards resistance and heroism, which was also reflected in forms of remembrance. Niemiec and Zielonko's design did not thus conform to the new political imperatives in any respect.

72 AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/9: Minutes of the meetings of the CKŻP Presidium of 17, 24, and 31 Mar. 1948.

73 Minutes of the meeting of the CKŻP Presidium, 2 Jun. 1948, AŻIH, Prezydium CKŻP 303/I/11.

Epilogue: Auschwitz—"A Tacky Stall of Cheap Anti-imperialist Propaganda"[1]

The aim of this book has been to discuss the conflicts and debates which took place in Poland during the second half of the 1940s in regard to the commemoration and memory of Nazi concentration camps. At the same time, on various levels—whether analysing the history of the PZbWP, the conflicts around Holocaust remembrance, or the debates over the trials of prisoner functionaries—we have seen how all controversies were eventually silenced and wartime memory gradually subordinated to the policies of the PPR/PZPR. The culmination of this process was the opening of the new exhibition at Auschwitz in November 1950, which should be seen as a symbolic event.

The first signs of tension in the political atmosphere surrounding the museum could be detected in early 1949. The PMOB staff and members of the Historical Commission affiliated to the museum were most concerned about the exhibition in Block 15, which was to address the "roots of German fascism" and the history of Polish-German relations from the Middle Ages until the Second World War. The initial idea was that the display would convey the message that Hitler's rise to power and Germany's aggression against Poland in 1939 were the inevitable consequence of an age-old enmity between the two nations and Germany's unwavering desire to annihilate the Polish state and the Polish nation. According to guidelines drawn up in early 1947, Block 15:

> should primarily illustrate certain characteristic features of the German nation and, consequently, the misery Germany has brought upon her neighbours, taking their crops, destroying their settlements, and Germanising indigenous peoples. This destructiveness will be shown as a continuous theme in German history—from the beginnings of statehood right up until the Third Reich. [...] As far as Poland is concerned, German activity will be linked to certain periods. We will focus on the activities of Wichman and Gero and the battles of Płowce and Grunwald[2]; emphasise the role of the Teutonic Knights, their belligerence towards native populations, and their intru-

1 Tadeusz Hołuj, "Sprawa wiecznej pamięci", *Życie Literackie*, 30 Oct. 1955.

2 Gero (b. *ca* 900–d. 965)—Margrave of the Saxon Eastern March, subjugated the Polabian Slavs and the Lusatians; in the years 962/963 conducted a military campaign against the Polan state under Mieszko I. Wichman II (b. *ca* 930–d. 967)—one of the commanders in Gero's service, took part in an expedition against the Polans. Battle of Płowce (1331)—a battle between the Teutonic Order and the forces of the king of Poland, Ladislaus the Elbow-High. Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg; 1410)—a battle between the Teutonic Order and the combined forces of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

> sion into the raw flesh of Slavdom through the languages of Königsberg and Silesia; and highlight the times of Frederick the Great and Bismarck, and of Kaiser Wilhelm and the Führer.[3]

However, a purely national interpretation of history that made no reference to Marxist philosophy was not fully compatible with the policies of the Polish authorities and, at the latest from the moment the GDR was born in October 1949, proved completely irreconcilable with those policies. Pre-empting intervention from above, the authors of the exhibition scenario therefore tried to mitigate its anti-German focus and adjust it to the new political line of the PZPR. The concerns of the museum staff and of members of the Historical Commission are evidenced by a discussion which took place at a working meeting in January 1949. The exhibition in Block 15, argued Tadeusz Hołuj, should "underscore at every opportunity the difference between our attitude towards the Germans in general and our attitude towards Nazism".[4] For Holuj, the problem was that this distinction was an abstract issue: "There were no ghosts in Auschwitz, just people with machine guns. How can the exhibits reflect this? And therein lies the danger, for if someone wishes to discern anti-German feeling, he will always manage to do so." Hołuj also suggested that the exhibition scenario should be drawn up by someone from outside the commission, a person who "is a professional historian, liked by the authorities, and who knows the material". "[...] The subject matter", he explained, "is very delicate; it is a political and historical problem, and we are not able to get to grips with it". Jan Sehn doubted whether a volunteer could be found, however, since everyone would "realise that it is a sensitive subject". He proposed, therefore, that the commission should deal with the matter itself, and that "later on we can think of an institution to which we can send the scenario for political approval—FIAPP, for instance". Tadeusz Wąsowicz, the director of the PMOB, was likewise of the opinion that the entire project should be referred to the Presidium of the Council of Ministers to give the work a more official character.

In the end, the Historical Commission decided to supplement the exhibition in Block 15 with display boards describing the friendship between Poland and East Germany, the latter being governed by "progressive forces".[5] According to one participant of the meeting, "this section is absolutely essential, since the project will not

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3 Planning principles of the museum in the former concentration camp in Oświęcim, no date (before Jun. 1947), AAN, PZbWP 13, k. 14.

4 Minutes of the meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 31 Jan. 1949, APMAB, Materiały, t. 56 (Protokoły z posiedzeń Komisji Historycznej Muzeum w Oświęcimiu 1948-1949).

5 Minutes of the meeting of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, 11 Jul. 1949, APMAB, Materiały, t. 56 (Protokoły z posiedzeń Komisji Historycznej Muzeum w Oświęcimiu 1948-1949).

be approved by the Expert Committee otherwise". Sehn agreed that the introduction of such an element was necessary so as not to imply determinism in Polish–German relations. "The exhibition," he said, "[…] must be tailored to Marx and Engels, who spoke of the need to heal relations between Poland and Germany. Their call fell on deaf ears, but what they wanted is today represented by the SED."

The concerns of those associated with the museum proved fully justified. A report sent in November 1949 to the Department of Propaganda at the Central Committee of the PZPR stated that the Historical Commission lacked an appropriate political attitude. Aside from Hołuj, read the report, "who tries to adopt a Marxist position", the remaining members of the commission "distance themselves from it to a greater or lesser degree".[6] The author of the report suggested that in order for the museum to have an appropriate ideological framework, "an intelligent and knowledgeable member of the party, appointed by the Provincial Committee of the PZPR", should be delegated to the Historical Commission. Furthermore, he suggested that the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda, prior to granting consent to the further expansion of the PMOB, should familiarise itself with the detailed exhibition scenario. The report stated that "the museum should avoid elements that give rise to nationalistic conclusions (i.e. 'age-old German aggression'); it should likewise avoid elements of horror and the idea that only the Jews suffered mass extermination". It was also necessary to impress upon the Historical Commission "that the museum should contain a special block dedicated to the resistance movement in Poland, with the party as its vanguard". The relevant department of the Central Committee should vet the names of all people to be mentioned in the museum—victims and conspirators alike.

Matters came to a head in the summer of 1950 when Jerzy Bogusz from the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda, alarmed by "rumours about the political mistakes made by the museum", sent a special commission to Auschwitz to inspect the work being carried out there.[7] The commission included, among others, the head of the Department of Propaganda at the PZPR's Provincial Committee in Kraków and a member of the Executive Board of ZBoWiD. The inspectors' assessment was negative. In their report, they stated: "the plan for the museum contains numerous errors as well as politically false, non-Marxist assumptions that are a distortion of historical truth".[8] In particular, the authors criticised the "Extermination of Millions" exhibition (Block 4), which they said was non-

6 Official letter on the work of the Auschwitz Museum Historical Commission, no author, 14 Nov. 1949, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

7 Jerzy Bogusz to Artur Starewicz (official copy), 12 Jul. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

8 Report memo from the inspection at the Auschwitz Museum written at the behest of J. Bogusz, 13 Jun. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

Marxist and nationalistic and which presented the German nation as the eternal enemy of the Slavs. There was no shortage of personal attacks on Ludwik Rajewski and Tadeusz Wąsowicz, either. A book written by the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom—*Auschwitz in the System of the RSHA* (Reich Security Head Office)—which the party inspectors discovered was being sold on the museum premises, was condemned as nationalistic and anti-German. The museum director, the inspectors reported, was regarded by the local committee of the PZPR as a "reactionary and clericalist". As evidence of this hostile political attitude, the inspectors reported that on one of the walls of the museum was a caricature painted in 1945 by a Soviet soldier depicting "Hitler in the form of an oak tree, its boughs being chopped off by the Soviet Union, the USA, and Great Britain". According to the inspectors, "the Soviet star was erased [from the mural] and replaced with a red-and-white flag, which completely distorts its political message. The mural had been left in this state for several years until it was repainted at our request."

After receiving the report, Jerzy Bogusz decided to appoint yet another commission, which was to make changes to the existing exhibition scenario or, if necessary, redesign the museum entirely.[9] This commission included representatives of the PZPR Central Committee, the MKiS, ROPWiM, ZboWiD, and FIAPP.[10]

The first conference of the newly-appointed Auschwitz Museum Commission took place in mid-August 1950.[11] Two days later, Tadeusz Wąsowicz summed up its recommendations at a meeting of PMOB staff:

The commission has decided that the museum will be reorganised in such a way that it is not merely a record of the past but is also relevant to the present, so that the PZPR can influence society through the museum. The most pressing issue of our times—the struggle for peace—must be reflected in the museum. The thematic exhibitions in all the blocks must be altered to take account of the international context and not just focus on Nazism.[12]

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9 Jerzy Bogusz, official memo on the reconstruction of the PMOB in connection with the scheduled visits of delegates to the Second World Congress of the Defenders of Peace, no date, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/170.

10 Conference of the commission convened by the MKiS at the behest of the KC PZPR to establish a programme for the Auschwitz Museum, 20 Aug. 1950, SkAPMAB, Protokoły zebrań kolegialnych 1950 r.; Adam Kulik, official memo regarding work on the reorganisation and extension of the PMOB, 2 Dec. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

11 Minutes of the conference of the commission convened by the MKiS at the behest of the KC PZPR to establish a programme for the Auschwitz Museum, 20 Aug. 1950, SkAPMAB, Protokoły zebrań kolegialnych 1950 r.

12 Minutes of the internal meeting of PMOB employees, 22 Aug. 1950, SkAPMAB, Protokoły z zebrań kolegialnych 1950 r.

The introductory exhibition in Block 15 was completely revised, and a new contemporary political exhibition entitled "The Struggle for Peace" was to provide the finishing touch. Major changes were envisaged for the exhibitions in all the other blocks, too. The work was to be completed by the first week of November due to the expected visit later that month of delegates to the World Congress of the Defenders of Peace.

In a report sent to the PZPR Central Committee a few days after the conference, Leon Grosfeld, the Central Committee's representative on the newly-appointed commission, wrote that work on the museum was being carried out under the aegis of the ROPWiM and the Historical Commission, "whose personnel cannot, and do not, offer a Marxist interpretation of the problem. On the contrary, the work that is planned or currently under way bears the tell-tale signs of nationalism; it is divorced from current political imperatives or even stands in contradiction to them." In Grosfeld's view, the principal mistakes in the concept of the Auschwitz exhibition lay in:

a) the desire to turn Auschwitz into a museum charting the thousand-year history of Polish–German relations;
b) the separation of Nazism from the totality of world imperialism, in terms of both the omission of past and present links between Anglo-American imperialism and Nazism, and the omission of atrocities perpetrated by other forms of imperialism (aside from Nazism);
c) the absence of a class-based approach to the presentation of Nazi policy and to the stance taken by the Polish nation;
d) the different treatment given to the suffering of Jewish, Polish, Soviet, and other inmates;
e) the downplaying of the Soviet Army's emancipatory role—use of the concept of military and political fronts;
f) the failure to use the content in order to mobilise anti-imperialist forces, to juxtapose the GDR with West Germany, and to aid the struggle for peace.[13]

In light of the above, Grosfeld suggested that the historical introduction in Block 15 should be abandoned and a new concept for the museum be developed on the basis of the following proposition: "Genocide is the method and the means of imperialism, one form of which was Nazism and one manifestation of which was Auschwitz." The exhibition was to show "the brutality of imperialism in general" and "the link between Nazism and Anglo-American capitalism". Also, the role of the Soviet Army in liberating Europe was to be emphasised. The ultimate message of the exhibition was to be: "The policy of American imperialism in West

13 Leon Grosfeld to the secretary of the KC PZPR, Edward Ochab, 30 Aug. 1950, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Propagandy 237/VIII/55.

Germany and the entire policy of the imperialist camp versus the GDR and the struggle of the camp of peace, which is the struggle for 'no more Auschwitz'". Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter five, Grosfeld recommended that the "Extermination of Millions" exhibition in Block 4 should be treated thematically and not according to the nationality of the victims.

Work on altering the exhibition was conducted under the constant supervision of the PZPR. All the display boards and captions had to be approved by the Provincial Committee in Kraków; certain decisions had to be consulted directly with the Central Committee. In the new exhibition, the crimes committed at Auschwitz-Birkenau were secondary, serving only as a backdrop for political agitation. The exhibition was framed by two displays: "The Roots of Genocide" and "The Struggle for Peace", which opened and closed the exhibition, respectively. The former, an historical display, put forward the idea that fascism is the final and inevitable stage of imperialism and capitalism. The central message of the exhibition was neatly summarised by the description given at the beginning of the exhibition scenario; it was to show "what imperialism is, and to demonstrate that genocide and concentration camps are its characteristic symptoms […]. Imperialism led to the First World War, which was followed by a wave of revolutionary fervour with socialism triumphing in Russia. The enemy of revolution, the enemy of the land of the soviet, is Western imperialism, which is rearming Germany so that it may attack the USSR…."[14] The main enemies of peace and humanity were no longer the Germans, but the British and Americans. The exhibition presented British internment camps for Boers as the prototype for concentration camps and equated racism in the United States with the Nazis' plans for the Final Solution. Apart from Anglo-Saxons, the other main culprits were Polish socialists (PPS) and German social democrats (SPD), who—the exhibition explained—had betrayed the working class and sold it out to the bourgeoisie. The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Home Army were condemned as collaborators; the anti-fascist resistance movement in Poland was almost entirely composed of communists. Although the exhibition had display boards explaining the link between Prussian militarism and Nazism, it was emphasised that progressive forces existed in Germany, too. The Soviet Union was de facto presented as the sole vanquisher of fascism.

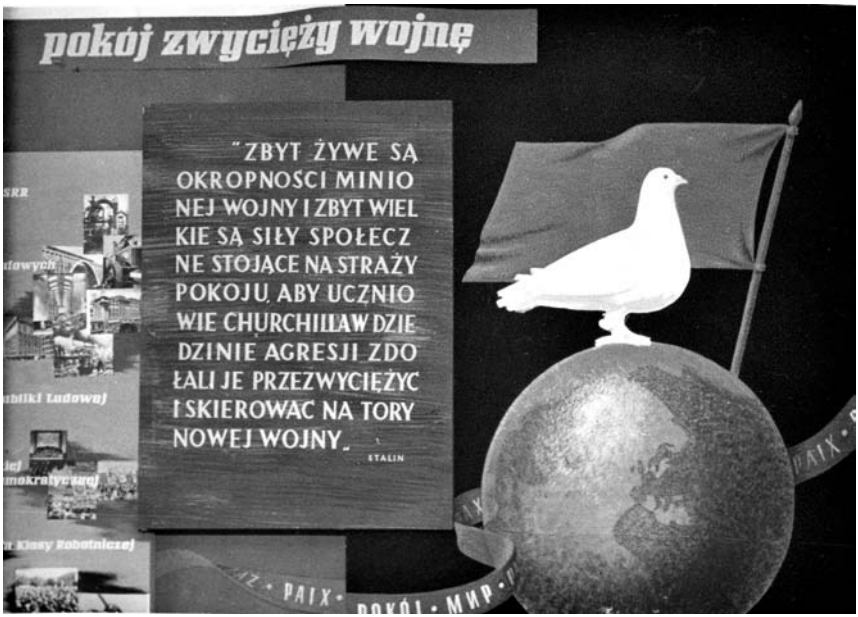
14 Draft design for the exhibition "Źródła ludobójstwa" (The Roots of Genocide) at the PMOB, no date (1950), AAN, ZBoWiD, 2/147 (there are two similar drafts in the file).

View of the propagandist exhibition "The Sources of Genocide", opened at the Auschwitz Museum in the autumn of 1950. The inscription reads: "Concentration camps – a tool of imperialism" (courtesy of APMAB).

The "Struggle for Peace" exhibition was more contemporary and political in character; its purpose was to convince visitors that although the Third Reich had been defeated, the struggle continued, for "capitalist sharks under the leadership of US imperialists are preparing to attack the Soviet Union, the people's democracies, and democratic forces around the world".[15] The capitalist world led by the United States, where exploitation, poverty, unemployment and war propaganda prevailed, was juxtaposed with the camp of progress, peace and prosperity, at the head of which stood the Soviet Union. The Marshall plan and NATO were presented as American tools of world domination. The struggle was to be waged on many fronts: in Korea, in the British and French colonies, in Greece and Spain, and in the countries of western and southern Europe. Fulfilment of the six-year plan was also called the struggle for peace. The exhibition ended with the optimistic message that "the Peaceful Forces of Progress, in alliance with the Soviet Union, are more powerful than the camp of war and aggression". To give a flavour

15 Draft design for the exhibition "Walka o pokój" (The Struggle for Peace) at the PMOB, 26-27 Sep. 1950, AAN, ZBoWiD 2/147

of the language used in the Auschwitz exhibition, it is worth quoting some of the slogans and captions: "Imperialism breeds slavery, subjugation, and genocide", "Concentration camps are a tool of imperialism", "The victory of the Soviet Army destroyed the imperialists' war plans", "Socialism is prosperity, imperialism is war", "Democratic Germany in the camp of peace", "West Germany—an armaments factory", "The Soviet Union—the mainstay of peace".[16] An identical message was delivered by the exhibition which opened in Majdanek in 1953/1954.[17]



View of the propagandist exhibition "The Struggle for Peace", opened at the Auschwitz Museum in the autumn of 1950. The inscription reads: "Peace will defeat war. The atrocities of the past war are too vivid, and the social forces guarding the peace too great, for Churchill's pupils in the field of aggression to overcome them and lead them towards a new war. Stalin" (courtesy of APMAB)

16 Protocols of the Qualifying Commission from Oct.-Nov. 1950, SkAPMAB, Sprawozdania i protokoły 1950-1952.

17 AAN, ZBoWiD 2/147: Material plans for the exhibition "Źródła ludobójstwa" in Barrack no. 44 at Majdanek; Material plans for the interior of Barrack no. 62 at Majdanek, the exhibition "Walka o pokój". Kranz, Wiśnioch, "Działalność oświatowa Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku", pp. 44; Balawejder, *Kronika Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku*, pp. 131-132.

Over the next few years, the influence of former inmates on the Auschwitz Museum and on the commemoration of other concentration camps continued to decrease, while the party's control gradually strengthened. Although Tadeusz Wąsowicz remained director of the PMOB, Jan Chlebowski—delegated from the PZPR's Provincial Committee in Kraków—was appointed his deputy; the two men were involved in a protracted power struggle.[18] After Wąsowicz's death in 1952, the post of director was taken up by Stefan Wiernik, a member of the PZPR and, as one document reveals—a former officer of the Security Service (UB) in Kraków.[19] At that time, changes also took place at the ministerial level. In January 1952, one of the main activists of the "Auschwitz lobby", Ludwik Rajewski, was relieved of his duties as head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom. He was accused of having introduced "excessively religious and nationalistic tendencies" into wartime remembrance.[20] Even during Wąsowicz's tenure, many PMOB employees were forced to leave; once the director of the museum and the head of the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom had been replaced, more sackings followed. The pretext for these political purges was an incident which took place at the museum during a reunion of former Auschwitz inmates in the autumn of 1953. Outraged at the lack of respect shown towards the victims, a group of ex-inmates tore off the cap of one of the Soviet guests and then accosted a party of East German tourists, shouting that they could no longer bear to hear German.[21] Stefan Wiernik also suggested that the purpose of the reunion, organised by one of the museum staff, had been to develop a defensive strategy to repel accusations that could be made against former camp "aristocrats" in connection with the trial of a former prisoner functionary which was taking place at that time.[22] In response to the incident, the Ministry of Art and Culture sent a team of inspectors to Auschwitz. They established that the only politically sound person at the museum was its director, Stefan Wiernik, who nevertheless lacked the relevant qualifications and was not respected by the staff. His deputy, wrote the inspectors, "is a person ideologically

18 Minutes of the internal meetings of PMOB employees on 17 Jan. and 28 Apr. 1951, SkA-PMAB, Protokoły z zebrań kolegialnych 1950 r.

19 Report on the inspection of the PMOB conducted on 21-23 Nov. 1953, commissioned by the MKiS, 28 Nov. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

20 Note by an employee of the Dept of Culture at the KC PZPR regarding the PMOB (official copy), 30 Nov. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

21 AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81: Note by an employee of the Dept of Culture at the KC PZPR regarding the PMOB (official copy), 30 Nov. 1953; Record of the testimony of Franciszek Targosz regarding the events of 11 Oct. 1953 r.; Record of the testimony of Jerzy Brandhuber regarding the events of 11 Oct. 1953 r.

22 Director of the PMOB, Stefan Wiernik, to the CZM (official copy), 26 Oct. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

opposed to the new reality", while the former inmates employed by the museum administration "essentially have no ideological beliefs. The fact that they work for the museum is merely a result of their psychopathic attachment to the place, and when they recall their camp experiences they do so from a martyrological and excessively religious position that is not devoid of residual nationalist sentiment, either."[23] The staff of the Auschwitz Museum do not, therefore, guarantee "that the political line of the museum will not be distorted". The matter of the PMOB, wrote head of the Central Committee's Department of Culture to Deputy Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz, "now demands a more robust political solution, for there is no doubt that Auschwitz has 'slipped from our grasp', if indeed it was ever within our grasp".[24]

In a letter sent in November of that year to the chairman of ZBoWiD's Executive Board, Franciszek Jóźwiak, the Minister of Culture, Włodzimierz Sokorski, wrote that it was undesirable "that former Auschwitz inmates should be working for the museum management". Consequently, the Central Museum Administration was ordered to carry out "a planned replacement of personnel" within the PMOB and, in particular, "to ensure that politically sensitive and managerial posts are filled with candidates who will guarantee the flawless implementation of our policy in regard to museums and monuments of the struggle against fascism. Former Auschwitz inmates will need to be removed from those posts, since they represent excessively religious, martyrological, and nationalistic deviation from the museum's exhibition policy."[25]

The "struggle against victimhood" campaign that commenced in 1948 not only subordinated interpretations of the Second World War to communist ideology but also, in the longer term, led to the general marginalisation of wartime remembrance. This was due to the deliberate policy of the Polish authorities, who, in wanting to mobilise society around the idea of national reconstruction and transformation, devoted less time and fewer resources to researching and commemorating wartime martyrdom. In 1950, the Central Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland had to close almost all of its branch offices, its work being virtually suspended until the mid-1960s[26], while the Department

23 Report on the inspection of the PMOB conducted on 21-23 Nov. 1953, commissioned by the MKiS, 28 Nov. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

24 Head of the Dept of Culture at the KC PZPR, Paweł Hoffman, to Józef Cyrankiewicz, 28 Nov. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

25 Minister of Art and Culture Włodzimierz Sokorski to the President of the ZG ZBoWiD, Franciszek Jóźwiak, 10 Nov. 1953, AAN, KC PZPR, Wydz. Kultury 237/XVIII/81.

26 On this subject, see: Maria Rutowska, "Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej", *Przegląd Zachodni* 3 (1995), pp. 144-150; "Wystąpienie dyrektora generalnego Komisji dr Ryszarda Walczaka podczas

for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, initially downsized to only three members of staff, was closed for good in 1954. The money allocated to museums of martyrdom was also cut, and in the case of the Majdanek Museum, liquidation was even considered. As many contemporary observers noted, however, the policy of the Communist authorities reflected Polish society's declining interest in the subject of the occupation.[27] This may be partly explained by a desire to overcome the trauma of the war years and look towards the future. It is also true that commemorative rituals, dominated as they were by political propaganda, did not fulfil a social need. To illustrate: in the years 1950-1954, the number of people visiting the Auschwitz Museum decreased from over 200,000 to approximately 100,000 per annum.[28]

Even some dedicated Communists were riled by such a blatant and unsophisticated use of history as a tool of political agitation. In the autumn of 1955, when the political thaw could already be felt in Poland, Tadeusz Hołuj published an article in *Życie Literackie* [Literary Life] in which he criticised the government's policy towards the Auschwitz Museum. "The museum itself," he wrote, "has already undergone various incarnations. At first it was an exhibition of 'martyrdom', then it was developed in piecemeal fashion as a thematic display, before finally being turned into a tacky stall of cheap anti-imperialist propaganda […]. Artists daubed the walls with crude paintings, and display boards and captions were put up that nobody wanted to read. [...] Most telling is the fact that the former inmates themselves lost interest in the museum issue. They were thoroughly discouraged from participating."[29] In reply to Hołuj, one official from the Ministry of Art and Culture wrote: "It should be noted that the previous exhibition [at the PMOB] played a very important role in exposing Nazism and imperialism. However, Citizen Hołuj appears incapable of thinking in Marxist terms: that which a few years ago was positive and pertinent is now no longer suitable."[30]

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uroczystości 50-lecia Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej", *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 38 (1995), pp. 12-15.

27 See: Dmitrów, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków*, pp. 157-159.

28 Kucia, *Auschwitz jako fakt społeczny*, p. 68

29 Tadeusz Hołuj, "Sprawa wiecznej pamięci", *Życie Literackie*, 30 Oct. 1955.

30 Official memo regarding the article by Tadeusz Hołuj entitled "Sprawa wiecznej pamięci" in *Życie Literackie* (30 Jan. 1955), AAN, MKiS, CZM, Wydz. Muzeów i Pomników Walki z Faszyzmem 21.

Conclusion

My research confirms Robert Traba's claim that in the years 1944/1945-1949 social memory of the Second World War had not yet been codified in Poland and was the subject of numerous, often competing narratives and memorial projects. Although, even at that time, certain topics connected with the events of 1939-1945, particularly those relating to the Soviet occupation, were strictly censored, on many issues debate was still possible. One area of controversy was the interpretation and method of commemorating one of the most traumatic aspects of the wartime experience: Nazi concentration camps and death camps.

Two institutionalised memory groups had a decisive impact on the course of this debate: the PZbWP, which mostly represented Polish former concentration camp prisoners, and the CKŻP, which represented Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust. Despite their partly shared experiences, these two groups remained largely isolated from one another. This was due to their differing fortunes during the war, their sense of alienation from society in general, the impact of Jewish self-help traditions on the emergence of separate social institutions, and anti-Semitism. Both organisations tried in various ways to shape society's image of the Second World War, and bitter conflicts often arose between them. However, these conflicts were waged not just between the PZbWP and CKŻP but also within the two communities concerned. For these memory groups did merely restrict themselves to promoting their own vision of the past: they also created a forum in which survivors could discuss their experiences of the camps, come to terms with those experiences, and find an appropriate means of expressing them.

The third important partner in the negotiations was the state: the PPR/PZPR and the Communist-dominated state administration. It was mainly to these institutions that the PZbWP and CKŻP addressed their demands concerning aid for survivors and the commemoration of victims. The PZbWP and CKŻP negotiated with state institutions in regard to providing care for camp survivors in the form of special welfare payments and subsidies for assistance campaigns; obtaining permission to organise commemorative events and ceremonies, erect monuments, and open historical museums and exhibitions; and mediation in conflicts between the two organisations.

The polemics and disputes of the second half of the 1940s concerned, among others, the image of former concentration camp prisoners: were they victims in need of assistance or heroes of the resistance movement? The answer to this question had far-reaching consequences, for it determined the PZbWP's admission cri-

teria as well as the organisation's profile. The trials of prisoner functionaries and the debate they triggered on camp morality were another important theme in the post-war settling of scores. Evaluating the conduct of the accused was especially difficult and aroused much controversy amongst the ex-prisoner community, since pre-war legal and moral standards proved completely inadequate when applied to the reality of the camps. While individual prisoners wished to bring their former tormentors to account, the PZbWP leadership tried to limit the scope of the debate, fearing that it could discredit the association in the eyes of the public. Equally painful discussions took place within the Jewish community in regard to evaluating individual conduct during the Holocaust and the meaning of heroism in a situation of absolute terror. Another contentious issue was the demand that the Nazi policy of extermination towards the Jews be recognised as distinctive and unique, and that Jewish martyrdom be given an appropriate status in the Polish landscape of remembrance. Finally, the issue of how to relay the camp experience and commemorate it properly was debated. This was a subject for which the traditional arsenal of forms and symbols had no adequate means of expression, and attempts to transfer knowledge about the reality of the camps to people who had not experienced them at first hand proved especially difficult—indeed impossible. The creators of memorials and museum exhibitions trod a fine line between celebrating horror and trivialising crimes.

Over time, the authentic and multi-faceted nature of the discourse conducted by these groups became uncomfortable for the state authorities. Gradually, as Stalinisation progressed and an ideological image of the Second World War took shape, new areas of conflict emerged. These concerned the issue of whether former prisoners should be defined as victims or heroes, the bringing to account of prisoners who had become entangled in the system of camp terror, and the national identities of those who had perished. The focus of the ex-prisoner community on welfare and its demanding attitude vis-à-vis the state ran contrary to the interests of the authorities, who did not want resources earmarked for the six-year plan to be re-allocated to social care. Meanwhile, as the heroic narrative became dominant and former prisoners were held up as heroes of the anti-fascist resistance movement, the authorities were able to use them to legitimise the new political system. The debate over the trials of prisoner functionaries shattered the clear division between the oppressors and the oppressed and challenged the image that the Poles had of themselves as innocent victims and heroes. Hence, the trials further fragmented an already politically divided society. Emphasising the unique nature of the Nazi policy of extermination towards European Jews proved, in turn, to be at odds with the official interpretation of history, according to which the principal enemy of fascism and imperialism was socialism as embodied by the Soviet Union. This conflict intensified in the late 1940s as relations cooled

between the USSR and its satellites on the one hand, and Israel on the other. The anti-Semitic campaign unleashed in the Soviet Union in 1948, which by the end of the decade had reached other countries of the Eastern bloc, including Poland (albeit in a milder form), also helped to turn the subject of the Holocaust into a taboo.

The growing conflicts between the state and organisations representing former prisoners meant that the autonomy of those organisations and their ability to influence society was gradually undermined. Step by step, the Communist authorities appropriated collective memory. They did so by breaking up or disbanding institutions that represented former concentration camp prisoners. The process began with the Communists assuming control over the CKŻP and the PZbWP, filling the top posts with party officials, and—as happened in the case of the PZbWP—carrying out purges within the ranks of the association. Representatives of both organisations tried to compromise with the authorities, if only to protect some of their existing prerogatives and ensure that their biggest concerns were addressed. Ultimately, though, in the late 1940s and early 1950s both communities were completely destroyed and marginalised: the PZbWP, significantly weakened, was incorporated into ZBoWiD and lost its identity. The majority of Polish Jews emigrated, while the CKŻP, CŻKH, and other Jewish parties and organisations were disbanded. The institutions that arose in their place—the Social and Cultural Association of Jews (TSKŻ) and the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH)—were entirely subordinate to the policies of the PPR/PZPR and devoid of wider influence.[1] The ex-prisoner community was also gradually distanced from jobs and institutions that played a role in shaping society's image of the past, such as the Department for Museums and Monuments of Polish Martyrdom, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites, and the Auschwitz Museum.

The Stalinist authorities did not monopolise memory by imposing a completely new interpretation of the past; they did so by adopting and using certain pre-existing narrative themes which they then interpreted according to their own model. Themes which did not serve the ideological dominance of the Communist authorities were wholly suppressed. While denouncing their political opponents and excluding them from public life, the Communists wanted at the same time to win over as many people as possible to the cause of national reconstruction and consolidation of the new political system. Communist propaganda took up the national–heroic narrative, which in the discourse of the immediate post-war years had figured as one of several interpretations of the past. This narrative was supplemented with an ideological aspect; namely, the phrase "heroes of the resistance movement" was prefixed with the adjective "communist". Those who did

1 An interesting angle on the subject of the Stalinisation of ŻIH in the years 1948-1950 is provided by: Stach, "Geschichtsschreibung und politische Vereinnahmung", pp. 410-423.

not fit the image of a "fighter for freedom and democracy", as propagated by the authorities, were either excluded from the PZbWP or had to reconcile themselves with their new identity. Victim rivalry between Jewish and Polish former concentration camp prisoners was resolved in favour of the latter. By internationalising the victims, i.e., by assigning murdered Jews to the countries of which they had been citizens, the Polish Communists emphasised that fascism (synonymous with imperialism) was the enemy of all humankind. In this way they also highlighted the martyrdom of the Polish nation, which, they stressed—beside the Soviet Union—had suffered the greatest losses in the fight against fascism. Fear and hatred of Germany, which permeated discourse about the concentration camps, was kept alive by Communist propaganda, albeit redirected towards the Federal Republic. The German Democratic Republic was incorporated into the anti-fascist camp. Themes which did not serve to legitimise the new regime, or which could antagonise an already divided society, were ignored. Score-settling within the prisoner community was thus brought to a halt. Those who opposed the heroic interpretation were silenced, and the Holocaust was no longer discussed.

In his book on memory of the Second World War in France, Henry Rousso describes the first post-war decade as a period of social mourning.[2] By this he means that people not only grieved for the murdered and fallen but also attempted to come to terms with their own past. According to Rousso, this mourning was left unfinished. Due to internal divisions and conflicts, after 1947 memory of the Second World War became an instrument of political struggle for Gaullists, Communists, and Pétain sympathisers alike. The result was an oversimplified image of the past. Social consolidation around the idea of national reconstruction demanded an end to trials of Nazi collaborators and a broad amnesty for individuals associated with the Vichy regime. As in Poland, this led on the one hand to the glorification of victims, and thus indirectly to the glorification of French society in general, and on the other to the avoidance of internal score-settling. In France and in other West European countries, however, this process was not so radical. Debates and disputes continued, and members of various political parties and witnesses to history were able to participate in them.

The situation was somewhat different in Poland: the influence of Communist historical policy on shaping memory of the Second World War, particularly memory of the concentration camps and death camps, ran much deeper than the impact of propaganda alone. The fact that "memory groups" were silenced, thus ending debate on the wartime experience, had far-reaching consequences. Stalinisation therefore interrupted social mourning, understood as a process of overcoming collective traumatic experience. It prevented or at least hindered a more profound at-

2 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome. History and Memory in France since 1944*, Cambridge, Mass–London 1991, pp. 15-58 (chapter: *Unfinished Mourning*).

tempt to come to terms with the legacy of occupation, the consequences of which are still felt today. This is not to say that after 1950 Communist historical policy did not undergo any changes. On the contrary, as other authors have shown, the space for public debate on recent history broadened slightly after 1956 and some of the issues discussed in the immediate post-war years were revisited.[3] This was a result of the regime's internal liberalisation and its quest to gain broader public support, but it was also a result of Poland's dependence on financial assistance from Western Europe and the USA.[4] The debate never reached its previous level of intensity, however. This was due, first, to the passage of time and the greater distance separating Polish society from its wartime experiences and, second, to the fact that the memory groups present in the immediate post-war years had ceased to exist or had become marginalised.

3 Cf., inter alia: Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej, 1949-1969*, Warszawa 2009.

4 Cf., inter alia: Marcin Zaremba, "Zorganizowane zapominanie o Holocauście w dekadzie Gierka: trwanie i zmiana", *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2 (2004); Zofia Wóycicka, "Zur Internationalität der Gedenkkultur. Die Gedenkstätte Auschwitz-Birkenau im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West 1954-1978", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 45 (2005).

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